

The Cameroonian Novel of English Expression: *An Introduction*



Shadrach A. Ambanasom

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Shadrach A. Ambanasom
Son of the Native Soil
The Cameroonian Novel of English Expression: An Introduction

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An Introduction

Shadrach A. Ambanasom



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Part Two

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Dedication

To the genuine scholar who,
while the rest of humanity is asleep,
stays awake and seeks to scale higher heights to harvest
shining stars, and to fathom deeper depths
to extract precious gems for our delight.

Acknowledgments

Given the monumental problems and professional engagements with which I was encumbered during the final phase of this project, completing it against all odds was nothing short of a miracle. Consequently, I am eternally grateful to the Almighty God for the strength, inspiration, and wisdom which He gave me to accomplish the task at this particular time. I am equally grateful to Dr Alfred Ndi and Professor Kashim Ibrahim Tala who meticulously read the manuscript and made very useful suggestions, providing insightful comments that helped to enhance the quality of the work. I am particularly indebted to Professor Tala for the 'Foreword' which, despite his numerous, time-consuming professorial commitments, he could still find time to write.

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Members of my family, especially my wife Ambanasom Frida, endured many inconveniences, and sacrificed a great deal to enable me to work with maximum comfort. Their love was just the additional tonic I badly needed. I am grateful to them for it.

Ultimately, however, I am solely responsible for any errors that the book may possibly contain.

Foreword

It would be difficult today to find any consensus about either an accepted critical approach to prose fiction, or an established body of the Cameroonian novel of English Expression to which such an approach should be applied. This study is an introduction to a marginalized corpus of fiction and to a new critical approach to reading fiction by showing it in application.

S. A. Ambanasom sets out in his eclectic and compelling book to achieve three primary objectives: to introduce the reader to the extensive body of Cameroonian novels which have been published in English, to re-examine the distorting and limiting criteria upon which the critical assessment of the Cameroonian novel in English has so far been based, and to bridge the widening chasm between literary theory and actual critical practice.

In order to achieve the above objectives, Ambanasom begins by elaborating an alternative and flexible theoretical framework which he christens the “Socio-Artistic Approach” and which, according to him, is “concerned with both a text’s thematic, moral, cultural or ideological issues, on the one hand, and its central literary analysis, on the other” He then proceeds to use this new critical framework to examine twenty-seven major Cameroonian novels in English, including Alobwed’Epie’s *The Death Certificate*, Azanwi Nchami’s *Footprints Of Destiny*, Linus Asong’s *The Crown Of Thorns*, Mbella Sonne Dipoko’s *Because Of Women*, Kenjo Jumbam’s *The White Man Of God*, Joseph Ngongwikwo’s *Taboo Love*, Margaret Afuh’s *Born Before Her Time*, Nkengasong Nkemngong’s *Across The Mongolo*, and Francis Nyamnjoh’s *The Disillusioned African*. The use of this unique system of interpretation enables him to offer fresh perspectives on the individual novels and to shed more light on the authors.

This book is, on the one hand, a study of how Anglophone Cameroon has contributed in extending the possibilities of the novel as a literary form and, on the other, a study of some of the conventions which have been established and which are necessary for a fruitful evaluation of the growing body of the Cameroonian novel in English. Seen in this light, it is a remarkable work which is likely to reshape the course of future studies of the Cameroon novel in English. It is also an indispensable volume for students, teachers, researchers and all those with an interest in modern critical theory.

Professor Ambanasom is a seasoned scholar in his own right and has considerable experience in University teaching, research and publication. He is therefore fully aware of the fact that literary discourse is an open-ended phenomenon. That is why he nurses the hope that the experience of reading this important book will stimulate the interest of readers and encourage them to challenge or enrich the theoretical positions that inform it.

Professor Kashim Ibrahim Tala
Faculty of Arts
University of Buea

Preface

Initially considered something of a black sheep within the Anglophone Cameroon literary genres, the Anglophone novel has gradually grown to carve out a respectable niche for itself in the Anglophone Cameroon sub-system, imposing itself in a way that makes it impossible for critics to ignore it. Now a vibrant genre, it even threatens to overtake drama and poetry, both of which have enjoyed more critical attention. The current impressive fictional output by Anglophone Cameroonians deserves more than just the kind of sporadic, albeit, interesting critical comments or reviews one reads about it in our newspapers, notably *The Post*.

It is for this reason that this work has been written. In addition, having read my earlier critical works, *Education of the Deprived* (2003), and *The Dregs of Humanity* (2005), some lovers of Cameroon Anglophone literature have expressed the wish to see me produce another critical text, this time, on Anglophone Cameroonian fiction. I hope the publication of this study satisfies the desire of those readers.

The critical perspective applied in the text, the Socio-Artistic Approach, concerned with both a text's thematic, moral, cultural or ideological issues, on the one hand, and its central literary analysis, on the other, is essentially an orthodox approach to literary criticism. We believe that since ours is a young and emerging literature with little attendant criticism, it makes sense, to be able to implant a viable critical culture in our young people, to begin from the known to the unknown, to start with the traditional before moving on to more complex theoretical issues. That is why we have formulated this eclectic approach in the hope that other literary scholars will then seize the critical baton, providing the necessary constructive criticism before moving onto more sophisticated formulations with appropriate practical application. This will then provide our young crop of critics with a sound theoretical base. They will then know whence they are coming and where they are heading; otherwise to start them off with only current critical isms that have become buzzwords, without a clear sense of tradition, would be to invite from many of them garbled and often confused critical responses.

There are critical voices, already emerging within the Anglophone Cameroonian literary circles, calling for rigorous teaching and practice of theory in the interpretation of literary works, setting in motion a critical discourse. Such a call is salutary, and we welcome it. Those university

lecturers whose responsibility it is to teach theoretical courses should take this call very seriously, moving from theory to hands-on practice. What I have done in this book is my modest contribution to that critical debate.

Shadrach A. Ambanasom
Bambili – Bamenda Cameroon

Introduction

In November 2005 the government of the bilingual Republic of Cameroon conducted a general population census. Although by 2007 the results of the exercise had not been released, unofficial estimates put the population of Cameroon at 17 million. Out of this the Anglophone Cameroonians are conservatively estimated to be at least 5 million, constituting thus a linguistic and cultural minority vis-à-vis their majority Francophone compatriots. In his contribution to a special edition of *Patrimoine* No.002 of February 2003, dedicated to the celebration of 42 years of existence of Cameroon literature, Isaac-Célestin Tcheho, writing on Cameroon literature in English, gives the impression that the production of Anglophone Cameroon literature ended in 1982¹ with the publication of a critical appraisal by Nalova Lyonga and Bole Butake. His commentary does not venture beyond this date, and as far as his article is concerned, Anglophone Cameroon literature would seem to have ceased evolving after 1982. Well, nothing could be further from the truth, as even a superficial sociology of Cameroon literature in English would show.

In their seminal article, 'Cameroon Literature in English,' in the now defunct *ABBLA* (1982), Lyonga and Butake stated unequivocally that the Cameroonian novel of English expression, with only three published titles then, was the least developed genre in Cameroon. However, it is comforting to note that, twenty-five years after that pronouncement, at least 30 more titles have since appeared to the credit of the Cameroon novel in English, while output in the more 'fruitful' genres of drama and poetry has grown in the same proportion. Many short stories and tales have been published, while a number of philosophical essays with a literary character have seen the light of day.

A glance at the latest bibliography on the subject under discussion, published in *African Literature Association (ALA) Bulletin* early in 2004 by Joyce Ashuntangtang Abunaw (112-123), is enough to make one appreciate the range of what Cameroonian creative writers of English expression have written. Even then, no sooner did this publication come out than it was already considered 'outdated' by some scholars in Cameroon. Consequently, in order to update Abunaw's contribution, Hilarious Ambe was in the process of compiling a new bibliography which, by the very meticulous method adopted by him, promised to be really comprehensive. But death cut short his life.

The last decade of the 20th century and the turn of the 21st century marked a watershed in the development of the Anglophone Cameroonian novel; for that period witnessed an upsurge in Anglophone fictional writing. The sudden flood of novels from the pens of Anglophone Cameroon creative writers took the reading public by storm, as it were, and for a while, literary critics appeared to be ill-prepared for this spate of novels as they could not keep pace with the rate of their publication. Indeed, with regard to Anglophone literary creativity, it is no longer fashionable to talk of paucity of literary creativity (Sam-Kubam 205-208); it is more appropriate to rather lament the dearth of solid criticism to match the volume of burgeoning creative works produced by Anglophone Cameroonians.

At the level of consumption many Anglophone Cameroon literary works are school texts at the primary, secondary, and the university levels. As far as the Cameroon General Certificate of Education Examination (the G.C.E) is concerned, four Anglophone Cameroonian novels have featured in the literature syllabus for the 'O' and 'A' levels². From such evidence, it is fair to affirm that this acceptance and the valuation of the Anglophone novel signalize, to a certain extent, the coming of age of the novel of English expression in Cameroon.

This study sets out to investigate the central thematic or ideological concerns as well as the artistic execution of 27 Cameroonian novels of English expression. It is premised on the hypothesis that, as a realistic art form, the Cameroonian novel of English expression has social relevance to the Cameroonian society as a whole.

The rationale behind the study at this particular time is to dispel the impression, given by some literary pundits in Cameroon, through either their complicit mutism on the subject, or through their desire to downplay its significance, that the Anglophone Cameroonian novel does not exist, or barely exists on the negligible fringe of literary productivity within the Anglophone Cameroon sub-system. Consequently, the study intends to prove the contrary, that is, the vibrancy of the genre in Anglophone Cameroon.

To give us a better insight into the study of the close-to-thirty novels that make up the subject of this work, we have formulated and applied to the analysis of the texts the Socio-Artistic Approach, an essentially eclectic critical approach that has been sixteen years in gestation. During that time it was more or less our working critical tool, but for the first time it has been fully developed and expanded in the context of contemporary theoretical discourses, as shown in Chapter One and Chapter Two below³. We have done this in response to general theoretical demand.

Ever since the interesting critical debates between the critical theorist René Wellek and the British liberal humanist, F.R. Leavis, in the pages of the latter's journal *Scrutiny* in the 1930s, it has increasingly become difficult to carry out sustained literary criticism in a theoretical vacuum. The significance of the intellectual debates between these literary pundits lay in the fact that René Wellek politely challenged F.R. Leavis to state the theoretical assumptions of his critical practice. He told Leavis that it was not enough to offer close readings of the works of the Romantic poets as Leavis had done in his book *Revaluations*. He went on 'I could wish that you stated your assumptions more explicitly and defended them systematically' (qtd. in Barry 31). Consequently, many critics have since been aware that sooner or later they may be called upon to state the theoretical assumptions on which their readings of literary works are based. Besides, as creators and critics, if we must maintain our intellectual tone, there is a need for us to keep abreast with what is happening in the domain of literary creativity and criticism in matters of theory. We are living in a globalized world and cannot afford to be theoretically innocent.

The first two chapters of our work are thus concerned with theoretical issues; the remaining five chapters deal with the practical application of the critical approach. The chapters are structured thematically, each encompassing the novels of several writers. Throughout the discussion of the novels in each chapter, the spirit of the Socio-Artistic Approach is generally manifest. Thematic, cultural, ideological and aesthetic aspects are high-lighted wherever these can help to illuminate the texts concerned. Like artists elsewhere, Anglophone Cameroonian novelists are centrally concerned with the value of pleasure, with the desire to please and entertain the reader. However, the most effective Anglophone novelist, like the most effective artist, is one who pleases while he teaches. And here the evocation of moral, political and ideological issues becomes important in the novels.

It is now appropriate to look at the criteria used to select novels for the study. The first criterion is that the novels should have been originally published in English by Cameroonians from the North-West and the South-West Provinces, the present English-speaking provinces of Cameroon that had become part of the British colonial empire. The next is that the novels should have been written for the general adult readers, a consideration that excludes novels written for children or the young adolescents, that is, short novels with simplified plots and a thin narrative structure of interest to children. Another criterion is that the novels should have been, at least, reasonably executed and worth criticising. It makes little sense to include in a project of this nature a novel that will attract from the critic's pen mostly negative observations and destructive critical comments. One

consideration is that of the availability of the novels; that is, the reader should be able to locate copies of the novels in a bookshop, on the street and in a public or private library. All the novels discussed in this work are those that we have been able to lay our hands on.

At a very personal level, my novel, *Son of the Native Soil* (third edition 2007) a text now recommended by the Cameroon G.C.E. Board for the Ordinary Level Literature syllabus, is not part of the project because I do not consider it proper to critically analyse my own work. This is a job for other critics. After everything, there is a category of otherwise acceptable novels kept out of this study largely on account of time constraint and limitations of space. The researcher came upon these novels at the concluding or near the concluding stage of the project; it was, therefore, too late to incorporate them. Here is work for future projects.

Notes

1. See Tcheho's article, 'La carte littéraire du Cameroun: quelques observations et interrogations in *Patrimoine* Hors Série no. 002, février 2003 p. 14.
2. The four novels are Kenjo Jumbam's *The White Man of God* (1980), L.T. Asong's *The Crown of Thorns* (1993), and *No Way to Die* (1993), and Shadrach A. Ambanasom's *Son of the Native Soil* (3rd edition 2007).
3. The Socio-Artistic Approach, existing only in a monographic form and printed in 1991 by Unique Printers Bamenda, was first presented and discussed at a language and literature seminar organised by the English Department of the University of Buea in January, 2001.

Chapter One

The Socio-Artistic Approach

In reviewing literature on African literary criticism, around the last quarter of the 20th century, the present writer discovered roughly three critical tendencies in matters of valuation¹. The first tendency consists of critics like Charles Larson and Eustace Palmer who place emphasis on the artistic side of the literary work; the second of scholars like Abiola Irele, E. Emenyonu, Chinweizu, O. Jemie and I. Madubuike for whom the sociological dimension is more important; and the third of literary pundits like Bernth Lindfors, Dan Izevbaye and Emmanuel Ngara who are more inclined towards a relativist approach wherein more than one critical orientation is sought for whatever light it can shed on a work of art which, in any case, can sometimes be an elephant in front of blind men: while each person grasps an aspect of the truth, the whole truth eludes each one of them. The first two approaches need not be mutually exclusive; it should not be a question of either one or the other. While not suggesting that the first two groups of critics have taken an absolute stand (indeed, Abiola Irele's group still recognises the importance of artistry, only that for them the sociological is slightly more valuable) it is worth noting here that absolutist criticism would not do in contemporary African literary criticism. It seems that the third, relativist tendency is the way forward. This book defends the thesis that, while there are scholarly efforts underway to eventually formulate a genuine black aesthetic, we can do, for now, with reasonable eclectic critical approaches like the Socio-Artistic Approach with regard to African literary criticism.

In this eclectic regard the following critical observation by David Daiche is instructive:

To enjoy with discrimination, to discern value, to recognise and reject the spurious, never to be fooled by the shabby and the second-hand that is the civilised approach. We turn to criticism to develop and strengthen that approach. Every effective critic sees some facet of literary art and develops an awareness with respect to it; but the total vision or something approximating it, comes only to those who learn how to blend the insights yielded by many critical approaches (qtd. in Brown and Olmsted 335).

Accordingly, the Socio-Artistic Approach tilts in the direction of an enlightened eclecticism. It brings together the salient features of both the artistic and the sociological approaches for a better and deeper apprehension of the full meaning and significance as well as the aesthetic realisation of the imaginative work, hence the designation Socio-Artistic Criticism. It makes for three cognitive operations to be carried out by the literary critic: the descriptive, analytical and evaluative. In other words the approach will demand that the critic not only describe what goes on in a novel with reference to its wider social context but that he also analyses the effectiveness of the techniques and the linguistic and paralinguistic resources deployed by the creative writer. Finally, the approach will require the critic to evaluate the overall success of the writer's use of technique to express in an artistic fashion some of the cultural, social, moral and ideological issues of his time, or, for that matter, of all time.

But to better understand the Socio-Artistic Approach it is appropriate to first attempt an answer to the following question: What do we really mean by the sociological and artistic approaches to literature? We will tackle first issues relating to the sociological aspect of the approach before proceeding to those concerning the artistic dimension.

The Sociological Dimension

Generally, a sociological approach to literature means analysing a literary text from a sociologically-informed view point. Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingewood (1972) define sociology as:

Essentially the scientific objective study of man in society, the study of social institutions and social processes; it seeks to answer the question of how society is possible, how it works, why it persists. Through a rigorous examination of the social institutions, religious, economic, political and familial which together constitute what is called social structure, a picture emerges, not always clearly, of the ways in which man adapts to, and is conditioned by particular societies; of the mechanisms of 'socialisation', the process of cultural learning, whereby individuals are allocated to and accept their respective roles in the social structure (11-12).

Establishing a relationship between sociology and literature, these authors affirm that like sociology, literature is basically concerned with man's social world, his adaptation to it and intention to transform it. Referring to the novel as the major literary genre of the industrial society, they stress that as an art form the novel is a true attempt to recreate the

social world of man's relation with his family, politics, the state and other institutions, and that it depicts conflicts and tensions between groups and social classes. Therefore, from a purely documentary perspective, they add, the novel deals with 'much the same social, political and economic textures as sociology'. Nevertheless, they caution that, as art, literature goes beyond a purely descriptive and scientific analysis of society, penetrating the surfaces of social life to show the ways in which 'men and women experience society as feeling' (12-13).

Unlike Priscilla B.P. Clark to be discussed below, Laurenson and Swingewood do not make any distinction between the expressions 'sociology of literature' and 'literary sociology,' terms which they use interchangeably. According to them there are two basic approaches to the sociology of literature, the more popular perspective of which is the documentary aspect of literature. This approach views literature as a mirror of the age, a reflection of the values and feelings of a people; it regards literature as depicting people's hopes, fears and aspirations and thus constituting a significant sociological barometer of human response to social forces (17). However, the co-authors acknowledge the limitations of this approach which 'ignores the writer himself, his awareness and intention. Great writers do not set out simply to depict the social world in largely descriptive terms' (15).

The second approach to a literary sociology places less emphasis on the work itself; it emphasises instead the production side of the work and the social situation of the writer. Emphasis is rather on the context than on the text. In brief, then, according to Laurenson and Swingewood, the sociology of literature sets out to understand not so much the artistic as the social content of literary works, the social contexts of their authors and the effect of the works on the immediate societies that give rise to them. Partly echoing Laurenson and Swingewood, Emmanuel Yenshu (1996) holds that the sociology of literature goes 'beyond the critic's preoccupation with issues of style and form to deal with the social origins of and relevance of artistic creation and the status of the writer and his message in his society' (105).

Abiola Irele (*African Experience* 34) looks at the issue in three ways. The first is the sociology of literary production, incorporating the organisation of literary artists, the conditions of literary creation, the reading public and distribution of the products. The second concerns the analysis of the content of literary works with heavy emphasis on the culture and tradition behind it, and the third consists of correlating the work to the social background to see how the author's intentions and attitude issue out of the social context of his art. We have incorporated into our approach Abiola Irele's point two, but with reasonable reference to, and not heavy emphasis on, the culture and tradition behind a literary work, and most of point three.

Irele's first and third aspects of the sociological approach to literature roughly and respectively correspond to Priscilla B.P. Clark's (107) sociology of literature and literary sociology. For Clark sociology of literature 'most often designates the study of literary institutions and the social organisation of literary life, discussions of publishers, critics, writers' circles, journalists' (108). This also includes the gathering of data about literary life, e.g. books written, published, sold, bought, reviewed, read, remembered or forgotten. On the other hand, according to Clark, students with a predisposition for literary criticism are more likely to prefer literary sociology which is the reading of literary texts from a sociologically informed view point. At the risk of over-simplification, for sociology of literature emphasis is on the context while looking at the text; for literary sociology the stress is on the text while paying attention to the context.

The sociology of literature, says Clark, 'recognises the literary significance of the social contexts that define literature, contexts that literature in turn defines' (107). But we should not, she cautions, regard the distinction between both aspects of the sociological approach to literature as absolute

Since almost any sociologically oriented study makes some sort of accommodation between the two. The student of literature will return to the literary work; the more sociologically disposed will revert to social phenomena. But each will have moved away from the point of origin before returning to it (108).

As students of literature we are therefore more interested in literary sociology. The importance of grasping the idea of literary sociology is obvious; for example, if readers are to fully understand and appreciate the writer's attitude and the treatment of his subject matter, they will need to know the essential social factors that formed part of his greater field of existence and consequently impinged on his consciousness at the time of his creative activity.

From all that we have reviewed the central idea should now have begun to crystallise: the importance of social context in the production of literary works. The fact should now become clear that literature does not exist in a vacuum, but that it emerges out of the social and historical experience of the people producing it. This social and historical dimension then becomes a crucial aspect of any valid literary criticism; for any critic who decides to ignore it is likely to go astray in some of his pronouncements on a literary work.

Under the sociological dimension of the Cameroonian/African novel we will include such elements as subject matter, themes, any relevant cultural, social, historical or ideological references that may throw light on

the novel, and its social relevance to its immediate society. In other words, under the sociological we take into account the social, moral, cultural and ideological values that a work advocates, endorses or even refutes. One readily agrees with T.S. Eliot that 'The greatness of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards' (qtd. in Irele, *African Experience* 40). We should stress that not all elements will receive equal treatment in all novels analysed. Depending on the unique nature of the work, some of the elements will be given more attention than the others. We are not going to overwhelm the reader with irrelevant, minute cultural details and social references all in the name of the sociological approach. Therefore, in relating the novel to its wider social context, pertinence and relevance will be our watch words.

The sociological approach carries with it two possible dangers that should be eschewed. On the one hand in the hands of neophytes the Socio-Artistic Criticism may become a mere worship of the sociological and nothing but the sociological. These novices will believe that all they need to do is to discuss plots, subject matter, themes, and the social and historical relevance of the work (Palmer *Growth of African Novel* 7). On the other hand mediocre works may be more highly rated over better ones because of their sociological relevance (*Ibid*). And from here it is a short step to the logical conclusion that the only novels worth studying are those that deal with social and historical reality.

All we need say here by way of caution is that this should not be the case; the sociological will make sense only when techniques are well-deployed to articulate artistically the sociological issues. Indeed, within the context of the approach we are evolving, the sociological and the artistic dimensions are Siamese twin brothers: one cannot go without the other; the one makes sense only in the presence of the other. Therefore, any attempt to unduly exaggerate one to the exclusion of the other would ultimately lead to the death of the essence of their unity. For, the Socio-Artistic Criticism thrives not on mutual exclusivity, but on mutual inclusiveness.

When, for example, the critic has treated the sociological features of the novel, he has merely been concerned with aspects of content; if he were to end here, he would only have performed half his duty. For, in the words of Bernard Fonlon (*Genuine Intellectual*), 'Content alone, however overawing, does not make literature. To become this it must be expressed in language of exceptional, or at least more than normal beauty' (92). Our next logical step will then be the study of the skilful use of language by the novelists: in other words we are now in the domain of artistry.

The Artistic Dimension

In discussing the artistic aspect of the theory we will briefly examine the following two words: aesthetics and art. Aesthetics generally relates to the study of the beautiful, of beauty. But essentially it is the 'analysis of the values, and standards involved in our experience of and judgements about things made by humans or found in nature which we call beautiful.' (Angeles 3) From this definition the phrase 'Things made by humans' refers to 'art'. But art is not simply things made by humans; these things artificially made must be seen to possess characteristics we judge to be beautiful.

A second meaning of art refers to skills acquired in experience that produce such beautiful human creations; in other words 'the ability to contrive, to systematically and intentionally use physical means to achieve desired results according to aesthetic principles.' (18) For our purpose, we are not dealing with art in general; rather, we will limit ourselves to the literary art where our two terms will be applied.

A good novel, play or poem, a work of human creation, the brain-child of a talented writer, is by our definition a veritable work of art. And any that is considered successful should possess aesthetic qualities. Therefore, a critical examination of a novel, a play or a poem should take into consideration the novelistic, dramatic or poetic features as well as the techniques and linguistic choices the writer has made use of to achieve technical coherence. The important concept to consider here is technique. In the words of Mark Schorer (qtd. in Palmer *Growth of African Novel* 9):

... technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, for conveying its meaning, and finally, of evaluating it. And surely it follows that certain techniques are sharper tools than others, and will discover more; that the writer capable of the most exacting scrutiny of his subject matter will produce works with the most satisfying content, works with thickness and resonance, works which reverberate, works with maximum meaning.

In the conventional, realistic novel we are talking of plot, characterisation, setting, structure and narrative technique; in traditional drama we mean plot, characterisation, setting, conflict, tension, and dramatic technique; and in poetry, we are talking of sense and sound, feeling, imagery, rhythm and other poetic devices.

We should stress that in all of these instances the peculiar use of language, dictated by the nature of the social, historical and geographical

setting, is primordial. For the equivocal nature of modern African literature in its relation to two literary traditions – the Western literary tradition and the African oral tradition – calls for a modification of Western critical canons. That is because, with regard to matter and manner, African literature owes a debt to both traditions in that while its substance and spirit are essentially African, the structures of its expression are essentially in European languages.

Yet these languages, as used by African writers, carry a distinctive flavour because their elasticity has been stretched to accommodate African perceptions and modes of expression, as well as the burden of an African worldview, revealing thus a scheme of values essentially African. In this regard artistic evaluation must issue from values whose cultural frame of reference is African; otherwise a non-African critic, unwilling to learn and to adjust his foreign scheme of values to the African, can easily be misled, by the way the African characters live, talk and behave, to prematurely dismiss African literary works with a wave of the hand as artistic failures.

Literature is a universal phenomenon, and to deserve the name literature a piece of writing must be seen to possess certain intrinsic qualities. According to Bernard Fonlon these three objective qualities are: that the piece should be true, good and beautiful. To be true means that a thing should be really what it is and not something else. A literary piece like a novel, for example, should be seen to be true to life. The reader should be under the impression that what he is reading did, or could possibly, happen; that in real life people talk or behave like this. Such a piece should possess verisimilitude without which it would be false since the ‘unlikely and insincere vitiate literary material’ (Fonlon *Genuine Intellectual* 91).

To qualify as good a literary piece should be full, complete and developed to its logical conclusion. Any inconclusive or wrongly concluded material is bad writing and therefore bad literature. In addition it must possess symmetry and proportion, and be seen to issue from a clear pattern. In a conflict, for example, the contending forces should be equally matched. ‘Lopsidedness mars a work of art.’ (92)

Above all, the literary piece must be written in language that is really beautiful. With regard to the beauty of language, we should quote Fonlon substantially because anything less might be a mis-representation of him:

A study of the content, therefore, is the first duty in scientific examination of any literary work. But content alone, however overawing, does not make literature. To become this, it must be expressed in language of exceptional, or at least, of more than normal beauty. Language is the form, or the formal cause, which contributes to make literature what it is...

Language is composed of essential elements, to wit, sense and sound; and each of these has its own share to contribute in making language beautiful.

With regard to sense, thoughts that are noble and profound, deeds of heroism, confer an intrinsic beauty on language.

With regard to sound, words have music or melody which they acquire from the vowels and consonants that compose them; when linked together in well-ordered phrases, clauses and sentences, they become endowed with rhythm. (92-93)

As we have seen above the aesthetic aspects of a work of art are the results of conscious but subtle efforts at work, efforts geared at producing a successful or beautiful literary piece. Therefore, any artistic consideration of the artefact must centre around the skills, techniques and linguistic choices the author has made use of to achieve his desired effects.

The Total Aesthetic Situation

This part of the chapter will be concerned with the total aesthetic situation. This means that since we are dealing with the novel, we will take a close look at the important elements that come into play when we talk of the novel as a beautiful prose narrative about imagined real people. Broadly speaking, there is first the novelist as communicator, there is the novel as communicative experience, there is the critic, and, finally, there is the common reader.

A novelist is someone who has experienced life and has been so profoundly impressed by its complexities, excitement, and ups and downs that he is motivated to transmute his real experience into fictional form for consumption by the critic and the reading public. There is no doubt that many of us have been through comparable experiences in life, but it is equally true that only an artist, a novelist, would be driven to commit his experience to paper; only one with the creative impulse would be propelled to produce a work, the means by which he intends to share his vision of life with the rest of the world.

The novel, the artefact, is usually defined as a beautiful prose narrative of substantial length, concerned with the lives of imagined real people. An African novel is so-called because the imagined real world evoked is essentially African in spirit: in their thoughts, feelings and attitudes the characters that make up the inner world of such a novel should signalize and reflect the African way of life, culture and worldview.

The novel consists of several aspects that can be grouped into two categories: content and form. As we have intimated, when he sets out to

write, a novelist must necessarily write about something, about an aspect of life, albeit in a fictional way. We are born and we die; between birth and death, there is a great deal that happens to us. Some of it may be pleasant, but a great deal of it is painful; it is an English novelist, Thomas Hardy, who says happiness in life is but an occasional episode in a general drama of pain (383).

So the novelist may elect to dwell on life's tragedy in general, or he may choose to explore such issues as corruption in high places, rivalry between two communities, the relative merits and demerits of one party and multiparty systems, the struggle between two families, the destruction of a family, the tragedy of young lovers and so on and so forth. What the novelist sets out to write about is called the subject matter, that is the immediate issues he is describing. He is saying something about his subject matter; he is expressing himself in an artistic manner about people, about aspects of life. He reveals his attitudes towards what he is describing, developing and exploring. And we the readers are more or less influenced by what the novelist is saying.

When we read the novel and examine the subject matter the novelist is developing, we may gather that a central proposition or a set of general ideas runs through the work. Though not explicitly stated by the novelist, these ideas are often at the back of his mind as he engages in his artistic creation (Brown and Olmsted 222). The central proposition or general ideas are what we call themes. And a novel may contain one or several themes. The novelist evinces an attitude towards his subject matter: he may be critical, satirical, praising or pleading towards his characters. This attitude will help us to situate the meaning or morality of the work.

The activities in a novel must take place somewhere; they cannot just exist in a vacuum. The time and geographical location of an event are important. Hence setting is both historical and geographical. Since, as we had said earlier, the realistic novel is necessarily socially conditioned, the criterion of social relevance becomes an important one to consider when one is engaged in an appreciation of a novel. All that we have been discussing – subject matter, themes, meaning, morality and social relevance constitute what we call content, a different concept from form which we will now proceed to look at.

By its very nature a novel must necessarily deal with a story, that mechanism that holds together the various aspects of a novel. The story line that runs through the whole novel, the story element that links one event to another or one action to another, the causal relationship that exists between one incident and another: this is what we call plot. In many conventional novels the plot outline may be chronological or sequential,

with an event leading to another, with activities moving inexorably to their logical conclusion. But some novelists may choose to begin their stories in the middle or at the end, thereby avoiding the chronological approach (Ngara, *Stylistic Criticism* 15-16).

In telling his story the novelist may adopt several points of view. He can decide to tell his story from the point of view of the first person narrator, or he may adopt the third person omniscient narrator who enters the minds of the characters and reports what goes on there. The novelist may even decide to make use of a variety of points of view as Chinua Achebe does in *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988) where he combines several first person narrators (witnesses) with the third person omniscient narrator. An author can use the flashback technique wherein the reader is taken back into the past to experience an event that had occurred before, or an incident that had served as the motivating force for the present one.

No matter what point of view he adopts, the novelist is always behind the narrators he has created. Often the opinion they express is theirs, but at times some of them are the mouthpieces of the novelist. And a measure of a good critic is to be able to discern when a character seems to be voicing an opinion or a philosophy of which the novelist approves or disapproves. Now, the plot and the narrative point of view make up the narrative structure.

It goes without saying that a story must deal with characters, and the latter more often than not are confronted with a conflict. This conflict may be internal, in which case it concerns the heightened mental consciousness, the intense exploration of the mental landscape of the character in such a way that the individual may become a divided self. He may be torn between two polarities as he poses himself questions of moral nature. On the other hand the conflict may be external, in which case a character may be pitted against another, or a group against another; a man may be pitted against a group, authority or society and so on and so forth.

A plot constructed on the basis of a well-dramatised conflict gives us pleasure when we find characters with different principles and attitudes criss-crossing each other's path. Our pleasure is even greater when the opposing forces are somehow equally matched, not only in arm-twisting force but also in language power. Let us take the unequal example of pitting an individual against authority, analogous to pitting a David against a Goliath. Therefore, such an individual must be unusually talented, possessing an imperious weapon to be able to compel the attention of the giant and also that of the reader. The weapon the character is endowed with in such a situation is speech power, language power: the ability to persuade through logic and emotion.

We come to know a character through one or all of three ways: what the author says about him, what he does or says about himself, and what other characters say about him. In principle, we expect characters in a novel to behave in ways true to life, ways that are believable and realistic. They should say, for example, at a particular moment what is appropriate to say. And the 'truly great characters are those who seem to embody so much of human nature or to reveal such depths of human nature within their merely verbal skins that they become images or symbols of man himself.' (Brown and Olmsted 214)

All that we have said so far has to be realised through the medium of language. That is to say, content, narrative structure and characterisation are possible only because language is used. The novelist makes use of minute linguistic choices ranging from words through groups of words, phrases, clauses to sentences to explore and develop his subject matter; he uses language to tell a story, to explore, develop and delineate character, to explore and express a point of view.

This is because, apart from their denotative and connotative meanings, many words intrinsically carry music, and others are heavily loaded with emotions. We can refer to all these elements of language we have been discussing as 'language proper'. They also include metaphors, similes and personification.

In addition, the novelist makes use of what Emmanuel Ngara calls paralinguistic affective devices (17). By this he means features like symbolism, myth, allusion, allegory, which cannot be easily analysed in the same way as pure linguistic items. Now what we call 'form' in criticism is the sum total of the narrative structure (plot and point of view), characterisation, and all the linguistic choices that the novelist makes use of.

The third factor within the aesthetic situation is the critic or the reader-critic. He reads the novel and is affected by it; that is, there are some interactions between the subjective state of mind of the critic and the objective aspects of the novel pointed out above. But who is the critic and what qualification does he possess to be called a critic and how does he go about reading the novel?

The Socio-Artistic critic is one with a clear duty, with a plain function vis-à-vis the novelist and the ordinary readers. He is one who, by virtue of his upbringing, culture, and unique talent, has become an enlightened reader of the novel. His unique insights and perceptions on a novel are valuable to both the artist and the ordinary reader. Indeed, as Abiola Irele ('Literary Criticism') says, criticism is 'a form of collaboration with the creative activity, for it gives articulated resonance to the writer's intuitions so that these acquire the force of public communication' (105). In our view the

valid critic of the Cameroonian/African novel must be one who will combine both the artistic and sociological approaches to criticism to produce these insights and perceptions. When genuine and professional, such insights, observations and comments will serve as useful feedback to the novelist. More will be said below about the critic in connection with the evaluation criteria.

The good critic should master the works he sets out to criticise; he should stick to the central literary analysis; he must buttress his opinions with enough evidence from the text and avoid impressionistic generalisations. A critic worth his salt must be intellectually honest. If he is moved emotionally or intellectually by a work, he should say so despite any ideological differences between him and the creative writer. As critics, we should all avoid the fault of dishonesty of which D.H. Lawrence accuses Macaulay, an otherwise brilliant scholar: 'A man like Macaulay, brilliant as he is, is unsatisfactory, because he is not honest, he is emotionally very alive but he juggles his feelings. A critic must be emotionally alive in every fibre, intellectually capable and skilful in essential logic and then morally very honest' (qtd. in Coombes 8).

The critic should stick to the creative work without insulting the man behind the work. A good critic should feel free to quarrel with the infelicity of expression, with an inconclusive, or illogical conclusion, with unequally matched forces in a conflict, with the lack of artistic truthfulness, and with the absence of symmetry or sense of balance and proportion, without abusing the author. Some creative writers are sensitive of critical comments they may perceive as insults or innuendoes on their person. Once Alexander Pope got so offended by the severe criticism of his *Shakespeare* (1725) by Lewis Theobald that, in revenge, he made Theobald the king of dunces in an earlier version of his poetic work, *The Dunciad* (1728). A few years ago, in Cameroon, a comment by Mejame Njikang on Bate Besong's poetry so upset the poet that the critic became the subject of the poet's scathing articles in one of the local newspapers (Besong 'Mejame Njikang Who?' 8). When he felt insulted, Sankie Maimo, a Cameroonian playwright, devoted a 31-page booklet to the vitriolic attack of a critic, Nkemngong Nkengasong, for his unkind observations on Maimo's play, *Succession in Sarkov* (1986).

By citing these examples we are not in any way endorsing the writers' defence of their works. A work poorly executed is a bad work of art; no amount of authorial defence can make it better. A solid work of art is its own best defence, and needs no authorial armoury. However, as we see it, self - defence by authors would be unnecessary, or much less so, if critics would endeavour to be as honest, fair, decent and objective as possible. A

critic should point out artistic flaws in a work of art without resorting to nastiness at the personal level. But, above all, he should first try to pick out what he finds to be the author's forte. It is rare to find a writer who would take the pains to publish a work worth criticising but would not possess a single good thing to be said about his work or style, no matter how faulty it may be.

Therefore, where there is felicity of expression, where there is balance and proportion, where there is artistic truthfulness, where, indeed, there are these and many more positive aspects, the critic should have the moral and intellectual courage to say so without mincing words; he should say so boldly and generously.

When all has been said and done, for the critic to have arrived at the point where he can confidently articulate his aesthetic awareness of, for instance, the meaning of a novel, it is not a simple process. This entails reading, serious reading, for comprehension; it involves perusing the work at least three times, with the main aim of apprehending the novelist's intention. Now, the first reading done at normal pace with the reader's senses and faculties alert, should be to gain a general feel of the work, to form a general impression of it, knowing very well that a novel cannot just be, but must be about imagined real people somewhere doing certain things.

At the end of the first reading, the critic should reflect on the general thrust of the novel's subject matter, meditate on it, and then come out with an initial synopsis of the novel consisting of one or two statements regarding the subject matter of the novel and the intention of the novelist. His second reading will then be purposeful; it will be to confirm, modify or discard the general statements on the writer's purpose or intention. If, in the course of this second reading the first synopsis is completely discarded, then a new one is formulated to be clarified and confirmed through further reading. The second reading is done at a pace that is a bit slower, with the critic's senses and faculties even more alert than during the first reading.

To grasp a general idea of the novelist's intention at this stage the critic needs to pay great attention to the structural layout and the rhetorical coherence of the novel. If the novel is in parts, he will find out how one part relates to the other; if it is in chapters, he will find out how one chapter is linked to the one that precedes or follows it. This basic approach equally applies to the novel's headings and sub-headings, if there are any. Any headings or sub-headings must be studied with care; they are not gratuitously used by the novelist. On the contrary, they are reading aids provided by the writer. Therefore, the critic should avail himself of them to gain a better understanding of the text.

Other important structural units of the text that enhance comprehension are paragraphs. Here it becomes imperative to closely examine the idea expressed in a paragraph to see how it connects with the one expressed in the preceding or following paragraph, and to study the techniques of articulation or rhetorical devices. Connectors such as the following signal a great deal of meaning and, therefore, ought to be considered primordial: therefore, similarly, so, but, nevertheless, alternatively, furthermore, on the contrary, etc.

Similarly, the basic structural unit of composition, the sentence, should be taken seriously. The noun phrase and the verb phrase, otherwise traditionally known as subject and predicate, need to be closely studied; for instance, which are the main verbs and what are the subjects and objects? In short, the critic should study the general grammar of the paragraph, page, etc., for all this aids comprehension.

At the end of the second reading, and having made mental notes or jotted down notes regarding all these elements, aimed at arriving at the understanding of the intention of the writer, the critic should now have formed a fairly good idea of what the novelist's purpose is. Armed with this idea, he now embarks on the third and final reading for reassurance and for consolidation. It should be stressed here that prior to any serious and elaborate critique of a novel a knowledge of the writer's intention is essential because on it depends the validity of many other critical pronouncements. For instance, if we accept the principle that every worthwhile artistic work must possess organic unity, then it logically follows that every significant detail, technique, or artistic device made use of by the writer must count, must be functional. And its functionality is measured in terms of its relationship to the overall aesthetic consideration of the novel of which the writer's intention is an important component. The question a genuine critic constantly asks himself or herself is how does this detail help in the advancement of the writer's intention or purpose? In other words without first determining the novelist's intention, which entails an examination of the subject matter and the theme, the critic will often err in his pronouncements, floundering confusedly in a sea of irrelevant utterances; many of his critical statements will be wide of the mark.

Finally, the fourth element within the aesthetic situation, the common readers, will also benefit from the professional insights of a genuine critic. For example, the critic's comments may well shed some light on linguistic, stylistic or thematic aspects of the novel that otherwise might have constituted stumbling blocks to the general readers. With the hurdles cleared away, the ordinary readers can now peruse the novel with renewed interest and desire, and with fuller enjoyment and understanding.

Evaluation Criteria

There emerge out of each culture certain things, principles or qualities which the people who belong to that culture hold dear. These things that the people cherish or value are called cultural values, qualities that are intrinsically valuable and desirable. These values may be aesthetic, humane, moral or religious. We all love a well-told story or a beautiful tale; we all appreciate an enlightening proverb or an intriguing riddle; everybody is excited at soul-elevating drumbeats, well-blended musical sounds or full-throated harmonious voices. These are the things (values) that we cherish because they give us mental and emotional pleasure, intellectual and emotional stimulation.

Others include respect for the elders, the young and the infirm; they include decency towards strangers, family members and neighbours; they embody decorum towards traditional as well as religious authorities. They include the spirit of solidarity, the spirit of sharing, indeed, the communal spirit. These are the values we treasure for the dignity or respectability they give man in his day to day relationship with his fellow man. These values must be preserved because of the basic sanity of human behaviour they make possible; they must be promoted because without them boundless brutality, ruthlessness, darkness or chaos would hold sway in our world. The values we prize must be preserved so that we can bequeath to our children and their children's children a spiritual location in a world progressively producing soulless individuals, too much pre-occupied with getting and spending.

Now when we say we evaluate a novel we mean assessing its literary quality, on the one hand, and on the other, appraising the values that the text endorses or urges (Di Yanni 7). The literary quality has to do with the artistic dimension. It has to do with what we consider good in the work; it has to do with how successfully the novelist has carried out his intentions, and above all, it has to do with how effectively the novel has pleased us. To assess the values that the novel displays, will directly take us into the dimension of social relevance.

In the context of the Socio-Artistic Approach our evaluation criteria consist of four critical standards, the first three of which have to do with the artistic dimension, while the fourth is concerned with the sociological. They are (1) Effectiveness of technique (2) Artistic truthfulness (3) Readability and (4) Social significance.

Effectiveness of technique

Technique constitutes the ways in which an artist, in our case a novelist, conveys his effect; that is, it is the means by which he discovers, explores and develops his subject matter, conveys its meaning, and finally evaluates it (Lever 87-88). Van Ghent also defines technique succinctly as 'vision' (qtd. in Lever, 88-89). And to the extent that the vision of a novel embodies what is seen and the novelist's attitude towards what is seen this definition is apt.

The novelist's tone reveals his attitude towards his vision. He may criticise or condemn it; he may glorify or praise it; he may wonder at it or wave it aside. Of course, all this he does subtly through the clever use of linguistic choices at his disposal. His tone of voice is very crucial in bringing out the novel's meaning and morality.

Since this is so, it becomes necessary to examine and evaluate the means by which the novelist's desired effects are achieved. Here we are squarely in the domain of language and language use; for the novelist makes extensive use of units of linguistic structures: words, phrases, clauses and sentences, to explore and develop his subject matter, or to tell his story. All of this is unthinkable without language, without words.

As we see it nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions and articles – the basic material out of which literature is made – when carefully chosen, ordered and arranged in a special way, confer a particular character to a literary piece in the same way that iron rods, stones, marble, sand, cement and wood – the basic material out of which a mansion is erected – when well-selected, chiselled, chipped, arranged and put together give an edifice a unique architectural aspect. This is because apart from their purely referential and denotative meanings, many words, especially verbs, adjectives and adverbs, are value-laden; they are vectors of emotion. They easily reveal the author's attitude towards his subject matter, and ought, therefore, to be closely studied by the critic to find out how effectively they have been used. In other words, words have connotative meanings as well.

By the same token some words intrinsically carry music, and when strung together in a particular way produce even more music. The critic must be ready to analyse the effect of this on his feelings with regard to what the novelist is trying to say. Similarly, many sentences or phrases, when patterned or repeated in a special manner, may rise to the level of poetic prose, giving a distinctive rhythmic texture to the work. e.g. Bernard Fonlon's prose. Again the critic would do well to examine the effectiveness of this rhythm on his emotions in the context of what he is reading, for a seasoned prose writer does not just employ this poetic device gratuitously; a novelist worth his salt must use the device for a functional purpose.

The quality of a novel can be considerably enhanced by the breadth and depth of the author's imagery, by the fertility of his imagination. This is shown by his ability to paint vivid mental pictures through the use of metaphors, similes, and personification. These devices lend power and precision to his prose. Equally important is the pertinent use of proverbs to delineate and differentiate characters as well as to highlight themes.

Irony is a technique often used by many writers. Since it can reveal the intention or attitude of a novelist, it should be closely studied. However, a cautionary note ought to be sounded here with regard to the technique of irony; it is this, that not all writers are Jane Austen or, for that matter, Jonathan Swift. Although in the hands of the masters it can be very effectively employed, the use of irony is very much tied up with the personality make-up of the individual masters. Therefore, critics should not be obsessed with irony, hunting for it where none exists, especially Austen's or Swift's brand.

If exaggeration is a technique used to produce the effects of humour and emphasis as seen in Dickens's *Hard Times*, others, like letter-writing and digression, are often used for character delineation and thematic reinforcement, as employed, for example, by Jane Austen and Fielding in their fiction. We do not intend to exhaust the list of techniques that can be used by a novelist because this very much depends on the personality of the writer. Therefore, no single novelist can even successfully use all possible techniques in a single novel.

However, some other techniques include the use of humour, contrast, understatement, parallelism, and coincidence, etc. With regard to coincidence, and since we are dealing essentially with the novel, it should be kept in mind that coincidences must occur within the limits of realism without which they can destroy the very basis of the form. Thomas Hardy frequently resorts to an over use of coincidence in his novels, and it constitutes one of their major weaknesses. But when judiciously used, coincidences can produce pleasant or embarrassing surprises and be occasions for the resolution or complication of some sticky issues.

In conclusion, techniques are not just used for their own sakes. The ultimate aim of their use is to produce literature that is satisfying and entertaining, literature that pleases while it teaches. Hence, the effectiveness of the techniques is judged by how much satisfaction and pleasure their use in the novel gives to the intelligent reader. The wide variety of techniques and devices employed by the novelist is a measure of the richness of his resources, but the effectiveness of the techniques can be seen only when every detail counts, when every detail is functional, in other words, when there is total organic unity of the novel.

Artistic Truthfulness

When we talk of truthfulness as an artistic criterion we are not referring to conceptual truth as found in informative writing; nor are we talking of truth such as obtains in the sciences where a claim can be verified and confirmed or refuted on the basis of empiricism. Ours is rather experiential truthfulness, that is, truthfulness dealing with imaginative experience which is true-to-life.

The Socio-Artistic critic who examines the Cameroonian or African novel would expect that its characters be realistically portrayed: the elderly African character, for example, should speak a language that befits his social status and age. By the same token the youth should speak like a young person. This criterion would demand that from the way the traditional Cameroonian characters in the novel speak and behave, they should reveal their essentially Cameroonian/African culture, their African worldview. The characters of a particular period and place ought to signalize, through their interactions with one another, the spirit of the period and place.

In other words, setting is crucial with regard to artistic truthfulness. By this, we mean the general environment within which the characters in the novel exist, the background against which the story unfolds. And the unfolding, development, complication and resolution of the conflict of a novel together with the characters and the issues involved in it should reveal a unique social context or a specific social environment.

Given the form of the conventional novel, this context can generally be socio-cultural socio-political, socio-economic, or socio-psychological. When in a novel the emphasis is on the manners and customs of a people in a way as to bring out the novel's local colour, we say the context is socio-cultural; when the accent is on political issues, we say the context is socio-political; when the economic life of the people is the major concern of the novel, then the broad context is socio-economic; when, however, the stress is on the exploration of the human psyche, of the human mental universe, then one can conclude that the general thrust is socio-psychological. Basic to the four contexts is the prefix "socio," since any novel has to do with imagined real people as a social group, in human society. However, the contents of many novels may not neatly fit into any of these social contexts, but rather cut across them. In that case we are talking more of relativism than absolutism. And this does not preclude the exploration or emergence of issues and themes outside those proceeding from the more prominent social context.

When the fictional characters behave in a way that is believable, we say yes, in real life this is how people behave, this is what people can really say, or this particular character's behaviour is sufficiently motivated. So if we

can say all this about the fictional characters, then there is artistic truthfulness. But artistic truthfulness is neither historical truthfulness nor correspondence with actuality. It is true that in constructing his virtual characters, a novelist may sometimes start off with a real life character, someone who really lived in history. However, it is equally correct to affirm that such a character is usually transfigured, changed into a totally different character, bearing little or no resemblance to the original. The virtual character has changed, has become new, hence 'novel'.

Sometimes, a bit of the novelist himself may be detected in one or two of his virtual characters. However, such biographical traces should not lead the critic to conclude that these characters are the complete alter egos of the author, a conviction that may give rise to misleading, disastrous, critical interpretations. Of course an idiosyncratic attitude or occasional incident in the life of the author may match one in this or that character. But by and large, they pale into insignificance when compared with the bulk of the imaginative material that has gone into the construction of the complex, virtual characters who, governed by the dynamics and internal logic of the story, have assumed a totally new life of their own.

What the novelist is saying, in this aesthetic situation, is that given the set of peculiar circumstances surrounding these characters, given their unique situation, this is how a character like this would behave. If he does not, then his behaviour is not true to life; if he does, then it is true to life, hence artistic truthfulness.

Life is not simple; it is not simply defined in terms of black and white. Therefore, a novelist whose vision of life is too simplistic would not score high marks on the criterion of artistic truthfulness. Consequently, when we come across a writer whose characters are neatly grouped, as it were, into two camps: angels and villains, or good guys and bad guys, we know we are in the company of a mediocre artist. But when we encounter characters who elicit from us mixed responses because at one point we cannot easily say that we totally hate or totally like them, when we meet characters who are complicated and difficult to pin down just as some of us are, we know we are in the company of a good novelist. Such a writer is likely to give us a vision of life that is rich and profound.

The story element in a novel should be such that we can say of it, this is possible in real life. But if it is replete with coincidence, transparent tricks, and gimmicks, it will lose its artistic truthfulness. And when the reader is put off by such improbable events the artist would have failed in his attempt to communicate because he cannot attract and keep the attention of his readers. Sentimentalism and overindulgence in sensationalism vitiate good literature. Thus a novelist who seeks to induce

cheap emotions from us by employing these techniques will not be rated highly on the criterion of artistic truthfulness.

Readability

Our third evaluation criterion is readability:

The sum total including interactions of all those elements within a given piece of printed material that affect the success with which a group of readers have with it. The success is the extent to which they understand it, read it at optimum speed and find it interesting (Dale and Chall qtd. in Dupuis and Askov 233).

Generally, the definition of readability is limited to linguistic factors such as length and familiarity of vocabulary, complexity of syntactical structure, relationships or connections between words, and the level of abstraction:

- 1) As far as vocabulary is concerned the longer or less familiar the words, the harder the reading.
- 2) At the level of sentence structure, the longer and more syntactically complex the sentence the harder the reading will be.
- 3) The more relationships or connections between concepts or ideas are required the harder the reading.
- 4) At the level of abstraction when the material becomes more abstract or less concrete, the harder will the reading become (Dupuis and Askov 233).

From the above quotation, three key words can be highlighted:

Understand, speed and interesting. A choice of simple vocabulary items coupled with a less complex syntactical structure will lead to readers' understanding of the printed material, a factor that will equally lead to increased reading speed. However, simplicity of words, while it may help speed up the reading of a novel, can paradoxically inhibit reading. For instance, a book written in a simple but boring style may force the reader to put it aside, hardly ever thinking of going back to it. On the other hand, while an elliptical or a convoluted style is likely to impede the reading of a certain material, a complex style does not necessarily hinder readability. And this is largely due to the aesthetic appeal of the writer's language. Two examples will illustrate the point; the first comes from Camara Laye's *The Dark Child*. Here is a complex sentence about the significance of a

handkerchief given to the young male initiates into adulthood by their innocent sweethearts:

As the handkerchief cannot pass unnoticed, as it is the one personal note that distinguishes the common uniform, and, as its design, like its colour makes it easy to identify, the wearing of it is a kind of public manifestation of a relationship – a purely child-like relationship, it goes without saying – which the present ceremony may break forever, or, as the case may be, transform into something less innocent more lasting. (115)

Here, we notice how the simple statement ‘the wearing of it is a kind of public manifestation of a relationship...’ is skilfully elaborated by Laye. He uses parallel, dependent clauses and parenthetical insertions thereby adding subordinate thoughts to the plain statement. What this shows is that Laye’s sentences can be smooth and very readable even when they are complex. Our second example is from Bernard Fonlon’s *The Genuine Intellectual* (1978) a treatise on the nature, end and purpose of university education. The section from which our example comes is talking about the positive contributions made to ameliorate the lot of mankind by the scientist-philosopher, the thinker-scholar or the genuine intellectual:

To this category of makers obviously belong the great benefactors of mankind who have invented sources of energy, new tools to make labour easier, speedier, more efficient, most prolific and life more liveable; who are creating or perfecting new means, new machines to make travel ever swifter, ever surer; to make communication more instant and clearer and, thereby, bring the far-flung peoples of the world closer and closer, together (130-131).

The sentence, with its careful punctuation marks of commas and semi-colons, to mark off the parallel phrases, most of them consisting of adjectives in the comparative forms, rings with the characteristic rhythm of Fonlon’s prose. In its complexity and elaborate nature the sentence is carefully written out to enact what it describes. The complex sentence, carrying its disparate components, moves gradually and inevitably towards its definite end, in the same manner as various aspects of complex and sophisticated technology gradually and inevitably bring the disparate peoples of the earth closer and closer to the emphatic finality – ‘together’. And this does not come about by accident; it is the end result of a meticulously worked out technique; it is conscious and painstaking art which renders

the sentence very readable even when it is complex. This aesthetic appeal of the language of the sentence helps to enhance one's reading speed of the material.

Of the three words – understanding, speed and interest – the most important, in our view, is 'interest.' Indeed everything else hinges on the word interest; for material that is very interesting has its own way of demolishing linguistic or syntactic obstacles before a reader, and propelling him to read on and on. Readers of Thomas Hardy's novels would agree that their high readability is largely due to the great interest the reader takes in Hardy's handling of character and plot.

The impending sense of tragedy surrounding Hardy's characters and the story element are so compelling that the reader becomes interested in the story and so wants to keep on reading until the very end. When we are deeply moved by the sense of fate that surrounds characters like Tess, Henchard and Jude the Obscure, when we are sincerely roused to sympathise or empathise with these characters because we think that they are unduly overwhelmed and crushed by a devastating impersonal force they cannot control, this sense of pity impels us to read the story with no feeling of boredom, with little or no ennui.

Our interest is not only limited to tragic characters, but it extends to comic ones, sometimes particularly comic ones. Because they are the satirical butts of Jane Austen's irony, the following characters in her fiction are very funny and contribute a great deal to the readability of her novels: Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Collins, Miss Bates, Marianne Dashwood, etc.

Social Significance

The central issue that emerged from our discussion on the sociological aspect of Socio-Artistic Criticism was the establishment of the social basis of literature: that is, that it is socially conditioned, a product of the social and historical experience of the people producing it. The importance of this consideration in the overall criticism of a novel has been underscored by the caution sounded by some literary theorists, warning that critics who neglect even the historical aspect of literature do so at the detriment of their literary judgement (Wellek and Warren 33).

What this calls for, therefore, is the fact that in the evaluation of the Cameroonian/African novel we must not ignore examining it within its wider social context so as to arrive at its social significance. Our concern here is to find out the novel's social relevance or its immediate value to the producing society in particular, and humanity in general. A realistic novel cannot be about nothing; it must be about something, about human beings doing certain things. In other words it must be concerned with an aspect of life, a facet of the human condition.

Such a novel may attempt to provide answers to such questions as: what does it mean to be a Cameroonian, or simply, to be alive in the 21st century? What does it mean to be a citizen of a developing country in the contemporary world? These and many similar questions may be addressed by any novel that lays claim to social seriousness. Such a serious social consciousness is what confers on a novel its social significance, its social relevance, its immediate value.

But serious issues alone, no matter how profound, how awe-inspiring, do not make a good novel. To do so they must be combined with technique, with artistry. By the same token a novel based on trivialities, no matter how well-crafted, how well-written, cannot be accounted a great novel. The old saying that good literature pleases while it teaches still holds true today as it did in the past and as, one can be sure, it will in the future.

We emerge from reading certain novels considerably grown mentally and emotionally because we have been profoundly affected by the scope, depth and quality of the novelist's vision of life; we leave such novels with an enhanced view of what it means to be a man, to be born, to grow up and live in a social community and die. All this is far from an easy bed of unrelieved pleasure. Novels that are well-written and at the same time make a strong impression on us as artistic social documents must be rated highly on the criterion of social significance.

Conclusion

Without going over all that we have said concerning evaluation, we can simply wind up this portion of our discussion by stating that the criteria we have high-lighted – effectiveness of technique, artistic truthfulness, readability, and social significance – are various aspects of a major criterion, value. Many critics, since I.A. Richards, have come to believe 'that the most valuable work of literature is the one which appeals to, satisfies and harmonises the greatest number of human interests' (Moody 8). We should add here that two of these interests are pleasure and edification as affirmed by Horace of old when he asserted that poets want 'to say things that are simultaneously pleasing and applied to life' (57).

As far as, the Cameroonian/African novel is concerned, the Socio-Artistic critic's evaluation of the overall work will take into account these twin functions of literature: entertainment and instruction. To deal with the latter first, the critic will consider whether the novelist has succeeded in communicating what he set out to pass across to the reader. If his purpose is clearly discerned, this is an indication that his communication is successful. The critic will then continue to examine the content value of the novel, its social significance. And this involves answering such questions

as: What aspect of the human condition in general and the Cameroonian/African experience in particular does the novelist address himself to? And of what relevance is this to the immediate African community and to ours? Answers to these questions will consist of value judgement in connection with the social significance of the novel.

All along, in this work, we have emphasised the fact that the sociological and the artistic aspects are inseparable: that is, we cannot or should not discuss the one without the other; a better apprehension of one occurs only in the context of the other. In other words, both are in a dialectical relationship: the more effective the devices of technique are, the better our understanding of the subject matter and the issues raised; and conversely, the more we master the issues raised in a novel, the better our understanding of the techniques by which they have been brought about. Therefore, the overall aesthetic consideration of the novel calls for an examination of the text's subject matter and the artistry of its treatment.

As we said earlier the ultimate aim of the use of the devices of technique by the novelist is to produce literature that satisfies and pleases, which brings us to the first function of literature. The effectiveness of these techniques should be assessed in terms of how much pleasure the novel gives the competent reader. Needless to say that some of our pleasure and satisfaction derive from the novelist's handling of character and plot, and from his adroit manipulation of language. Like those in real life, interesting fictional characters are those that can command the reader's respect, or draw his attention because they speak and behave in ways that are intensely real, even dramatic; they are those endowed with language that is not only realistic and in character but often forceful.

Human beings are basically lyrical in nature. Witness man in the context of the opposing binarism of joy and sadness, when he can be lifted to the level of rhapsody or elegy, when he can be genuinely moved to praise or eulogise. Now, a novelist who occasionally infuses the speech of his characters with functional lyricism or one whose style is lyrical in the sense that his prose possesses a lilting quality is, we will submit, a writer likely to touch our basic lyrical chord. And when a novelist, through the evocative power and beauty of the written word, can conjure wonderful pictures in our minds as we live the imaginative experience he describes, when a novelist makes us long to transcend the verbal signals and translate our vicarious experience into real life, when a novelist can inspire us to wish to return or belong to, or live in the period and place with the virtual inhabitants of his novel, we know that we have been transported out of ourselves; we know such a novelist has appealed to our genuine sense of pleasure and satisfaction.

Now, a novel that can inspire us to feel that much for it must be accounted a good novel, especially if it possesses at the same time social relevance. Therefore, when we come across one that has these qualities, we should say so without mincing words, and we should say so loudly and clearly, and we should say so awarding it high marks. And of course, the reverse is true. Any concluding statements we make about such a novel are judgemental remarks based on our total experience of reading the novel; they are the results of the overall impression left on us by the novel, educated statements guided by our scale of values as well as our sensibilities.

We should add that when we mentioned earlier, under overall aesthetic situation, issues of felicity of expression, balance, proportion or symmetry in the evaluation of a novel, this declaration should be considered from a conservative, structuralist perspective; for these essentially structuralist notions are now suspect. It is the aim of Post-structuralism to subvert them, to de-hegemonise them as Jacques Derrida (1994) insists, showing that imbalance, asymmetry, and lack of proportion in a work of art are not automatically synonymous with artistic weakness. On the contrary, they may be positive values, emblematic of alternative systems within a 'de-centred planet'. Post-structuralism and Deconstruction are out to dismantle totalizing notions. A derivative, more or less, from Post-structuralism, Post-colonialist criticism, to be discussed in the next chapter, also rejects these structuralist notions, and regards judgemental utterances or questions of standards as presumptuous claims.

Notes

1. See Abiola Irele, 'The Criticism of Modern African Literature' *Perspectives on African Literature*, ed. Christopher Heywood (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1971) 9 – 24; Ernest Emenyonu, 'African Literature: what does it take to be its critic?' *African Literature Today No 5 The Novel in Africa*. (1971) 1 – 11; Eustace Palmer, *An Introduction to the African Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1972); Charles Larson, *The Emergence of African Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972); Bernth Lindfors, 'The Blind Men and the Elephant', *African Literature Today No 7*. *Focus on Criticism*, (1975) 53 – 64; D.S Izevbaye, 'The State of Criticism in African Literature' *African Literature Today No 7 Focus on Criticism* ed. Eldred Durosomi Jones (London: Heinemann, 1975) 1-19; Emmanuel Ngara, *Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1982); Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike *Towards the Decolonisation of African Literature* (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1983).

Chapter Two

Enlightened Eclecticism

Literature is the site where ideologies collide, the location for the dramatisation of conflicting worldviews. Consequently, the exploration of the sociological dimension of the Socio-Artistic Approach will often lead to the examination of ideological or even psychological issues emerging from the texts under scrutiny. The nature of these issues will call forth the application of more 'specific' critical perspectives for their apprehension. It is, therefore, appropriate to spell out here some of the key theoretical assumptions, issuing from a logical expansion of the sociological arm of the Socio-Artistic Approach, and on which the analyses, readings, or procedures of this study are based; for the latter draws heavily on theoretical concepts associated with several contemporary discourses, for example, postcolonial theory, New historicism, psychoanalysis, feminism, Marxist Criticism and postmodernism, etc.

Post-colonialism, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1995), 'is the discourse of oppositionality which colonialism brings into being ... a sustained, attention to the imperial process in colonial and neo-colonial societies, and an examination of the strategies to subvert the actual material and discursive effects of that process' (117). Therefore, the postcolonial project is out to deconstruct the Centre/Margin binarism of the imperial discourse (*Ibid*). An important consequence of postcolonialism is to undermine the universalist claims made on behalf of literature by liberal humanist critics, claims that betray their essential Eurocentric bias.

Two books are very central to postcolonial criticism. They are *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon, first published in French as *Les damnés de la terre* in 1961, and Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968) is a critique of colonialism, particularly French colonialism in Africa. It articulates what some regard as 'cultural resistance' to France's African empire (Barry 192). Frantz Fanon's book is a clarion call for Africans to reclaim their cultural past that has been devalued by colonialism. 'Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it' (Fanon 1968:210). In the face of such colonial devaluation of their culture, Fanon feels that it is imperative for the educated individuals within the colonized community to demand for a national culture in a bid to reclaim and restore their cultural past. 'For these individuals, the demand for a national culture and the affirmation of the existence of such a culture represent a special battlefield' (209).

But the book credited with classic postcolonial criticism is Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), a critique of Eurocentric universalism vis-à-vis oriental (Middle Eastern People) or non-Western/non-European people, for that matter. It is an exposé of the longstanding European view of the East as the inferior Other. According to this view anything European or Western is superior, while the non-European or non-Western is inferior. Thus from the Eurocentric perspective Orientals are inferior Others. Today the verb 'Orientalize' has come to mean to construct or to textualize someone as an inferior person, different from the superior self.

In this context the West, the European, the colonial, in short, Empire, becomes the standard by which to judge the rest of the world. What is imperial, what is colonial becomes the norm. That is why from the perspective of the post-colonial the colonial is considered conservative, to be subverted. The colonial talks of standards and fixed systems; for the post-colonial there are only possibilities, continuities and novelties.

The Anglophone Cameroonian novelists under discussion in this work are postcolonial subjects producing their creative works in an imperial language, English. But the intimate and immediate circumstances of their lives that make up the subject matter of their novels are Cameroonian (African), a reality that betrays their hybridity. They are hybrid subjects emerging from a situation of a superimposition of a conflicting European language and culture upon theirs. They are children of two worlds: the one by virtue of their colonial educational upbringing, the other by the close attachment to their traditions. Therefore their imaginative works celebrate diversity, difference and hybridity. These creative writers are the empire writing back, to echo the title of a pioneering work in post-colonial criticism (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989). They are writing their way back 'into a history others have written' (Culler 131); but more critically they are appropriating that history for their own ends.

Now, the critical perspective attendant on postcolonial writing is postcolonial criticism, one that privileges cross-cultural experiences, cultural polyvalency and hybridity in literary texts. The postcolonial approach has acquired a vocabulary of its own, its own distinctive jargon like many contemporary theoretical formulations, a syncretism, an accretion emerging from a dialectical relationship with allied conceptualizations. It is characterised by richly compounded and inflected words and expressions, often rhythmical utterances like commodification, objectification, orientalisng, transgressivism, textuality, intertextuality, self-reflexivity, etc.

We should round up this section on postcolonial criticism by summing up, as Peter Barry has done, the concerns of postcolonial critics. They reject Eurocentric universalist claims; they examine representations in

literature, foregrounding issues of cultural difference and diversity. They celebrate hybridity and cultural polyvalency i.e. the situation whereby a postcolonial subject belongs to two or more cultures. The postcolonial critics develop a perspective whereby marginality, plurality and perceived 'Otherness' are seen as sources of energy and potential change (Barry 98).

The next theoretical tool is New historicism, associated with the American scholar, Stephen Greenblatt, a method of criticism which involves the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts of the same historical period. It emerged in the early 1980s as a reaction to the hegemony of New Criticism which privileged formal elements while occluding history and social contexts from literary interpretation. With New historicism there is no such asymmetrical privileging of the literary above the historical; equal emphasis is placed on both the literary and the non-literary texts. In the words of the American critic Louis Montrose, in New historicism there is double interest in 'the textuality of history, the historicity of texts' (qtd. in Barry 172).

According to Stephen Greenblatt its founder, New historicism has to do with the reading of 'all the textual traces of the past' with as much attention as that given to the traditional study of a literary text (*Ibid*). Peter Barry affirms that New historicism is historicist rather than historical, that is, it is interested in history 'as represented and recorded in written document, in history as-text' (175). Therefore, for the new historicist historical events and attitudes have passed away, and are more or less lost; they are now represented only in writing (as text). Consequently, it is but logical to subject the analysis of such a text or writing to the kind of intense examination that was conferred to the analysis of literary texts.

Worked into this bias for textual records of the past is the influence of deconstruction. New historicists espouse Jacques Derrida's view that everything about the past is available to us only in a textualised form; and it is 'thrice processed', that is, 'first through the ideology, or the discursive practices of its time; then through those of ours, and finally through the distorting web of language itself. Whatever is represented in a text is thereby remade' (*Ibid*).

With the inclusion of the thought of the post-structuralist cultural historian, Michel Foucault, New historicism assumes a radical, anti-establishment dimension. It is generally on the side of liberal ideals of individual freedom, foregrounding difference and deviance. At the same time, though, this strain of New historicism is only too conscious of the ubiquitous power of the repressive state that is all-seeing, 'panoptic', penetrating into all areas of human relationships thanks to its discursive practices.

Beside upholding the truism of the significant influence of historical reality in the construction of works of art, New historicist critics 'share a belief in referentiality, that is, a belief that literature both refers to, and is referred by, things outside itself' (Murfin and Ray qtd. in Mfolem 10). We will use this theoretical approach to analyse some of the novels in our study as the new historicists do by juxtaposing, where possible, the literary and non-literary texts; we will focus attention in both texts on state power and how it is maintained, on patriarchal issues and, where pertinent, on colonialism and its impact.

If New historicism foregrounds history and social context in the interpretation of a literary text, Psychoanalytic criticism is a kind of criticism that uses the insights of Freudian Psychoanalysis to interpret works of literature. Psychoanalysis per se is a science that concerns itself with the problems of the human mind; it aims to treat mental disorders by attempting to bring to the surface the fears and conflict buried in the unconscious mind, the repository of the causes of all mental disorders. Now, when the patient can be made to talk freely, in the open, about the repressed fears, conflicts, ideas, and thoughts, his mental health improves and he becomes better.

A few Freudian concepts relevant to our study need to be explained. Central to Freudian Psychoanalysis is the concept of the 'Unconscious', the cardinal concept, the most powerful and dominant aspect of the personality, 'a constantly humming power house of mental processes, of which we are generally unaware' (Rosner 33). It contains all kinds of unattractive or too attractive things: 'our deeply felt secret hates and loves, the powerful but uncivilized passions and desires in each of us' (Rosner 34). Most of these hidden drives are associated with sex. In our conscious life, that is, when we are awake and going about with our daily activities, these feelings and passions are repressed in the unconscious. However, unknown to us, they silently influence the way we think, behave and feel. They affect our careers and even the choice of our partners for life.

As for 'Repression' it is a kind of self-censorship which occurs in each of us without our awareness. On the one hand through repression certain of our anti-social desires are locked away in the unconscious part of our mind. Though kept in exile there, these unattractive desires and wishes silently create us trouble, hence our mental disorders. On the other hand sublimation is the redirection into socially acceptable channels of some of our deep seated and powerful drives. Finally, neurosis is a type of emotional disorder that prevents a person from leading a really successful and happy life. Unless in very extreme cases, a neurotic person can still manage to live a fairly successful life.

In interpreting works of literature, Freudian psychoanalytic critics highlight the difference between the conscious and unconscious mind. They link the work's 'overt' content with the 'conscious' and the 'covert' content with the unconscious, emphasising the latter as the location for determining the central meaning of the work. Freudian psychoanalytic critics thus place more emphasis on the unconscious motives and feelings of the characters or even the author. According to Peter Barry, in a literary work, the critics look for classic psychoanalytic symptoms or conditions, placing such a work thus in a 'psychic' rather than in an exclusively social or historical context. They thus foreground the individual psycho-drama rather than the social drama (205).

Alfred Adler (1870-1937), a former Freudian student who broke away from his master and went his own way, believed that the love of power and not sexual drives was what determined how a person thought, felt and acted. To him power or the search for dominance was the most important factor in each individual. The concept 'inferiority complex' was his coinage. According to Adler each of us has in him an inferiority complex. From these feelings of inferiority emerge a superiority complex, that is, feelings of being superior to those around us.

This idea of moving from an inferiority complex to a superiority complex is what one could term in Adler the Law of Compensation. Take, for example, a man like the famous English Romantic poet, Lord Byron, who had an emotional hurt, wound or deep sense of self unworthiness because of a physical deformity – a clubfoot but was still successful in life. This man might have been pushed, driven and propelled to excel in one area of life to compensate for his handicap or injury and prove, at least, to himself, that he was actually superior to those around him. And he did just that; he excelled in swimming as an athlete. Above all Byron was reputed to have had in the city of Venice alone over 200 women to whom he made love. (Abrams 1553) He therefore proved to his detractors that for all his physical deformity, he was actually the most attractive young man to the women.

Feminist criticism is another critical perspective relevant to our study. According to Lizbeth Goodman 'Feminism is a politics: a recognition of the historical and cultural subordination of women ... and the resolve to do something about it (x)'. She adds that feminist authors thus 'have a political agenda in the writing of their work' (*Ibid*). A feminist critical perspective in her words is 'an academic approach to the study of literature which applies feminist thought to the analysis of literary texts and the contexts of their production and reception' (*Ibid*).

Jonathan Culler (1997) stresses the political character of feminism when he says to the extent that feminism is out 'to deconstruct the oppositions man/woman and the oppositions associated with it in the history of Western culture,' it is a form of post-structuralism (128). Up to the 1970s the emphasis on feminist criticism was on 'androtexts,' that is, books by men. This was the feminist critique of male assumptions, procedures and images of women. From the 1970s there was a shift to 'gynotexts', that is, books by women, giving rise to 'gynocriticism', a feminist criticism concerned with women authors and the representation of women's experience (Culler *Ibid*).

Here is what feminist critics do as summed up in Barry (134): They reappraise the canon with the intention of rediscovering texts written by women; they revalorise women's experiences; they examine representations of women in literature by men and women; they challenge the construction of women as 'Other,' as 'lack', as part of 'nature'; they look at power relations that exist in texts and in life with the aim of deconstructing them; they examine the presence of patriarchy in texts and contexts; and finally they examine the 'essential' difference between men and women, whether this difference is based on biology or rather one socially constructed. According to Jonathan Culler feminists critique the heterosexual matrix that organises identities and cultures in terms of opposition between man and woman (*Ibid*).

A critical approach relevant to Chapter 7 of this study is Marxist criticism. Since Marxist criticism is an aesthetic approach derived from Marxism, it is appropriate for us, prior to any discussion of the subject, to first attempt to state, however briefly, what Marxism is about. But we should admit, in the true spirit of intellectual honesty, that we will not pretend to examine Marxism in any substantial sense. In the first place it is too complex and complicated a philosophy of social and economic reality for the layman to fully understand; in the second place we are more interested in its derivational aspect, its applicability to, or implication for, literary criticism. We should add that whatever view we express here relating to Marxism will be no more than a lay man's view, for anything other than a common man's notion of it, is beyond the scope of this work.

An economic and political philosophy formulated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Marxism holds that history is primarily determined by economics. It regards the history of any society, with the exception of that of primitive communalism, as the history of class struggle. With particular reference to the mid-19th century European society, Marxism views the history of society as one in which the bourgeoisie or the capitalist class had previously overthrown the feudal nobility, but that the bourgeoisie in turn would be inevitably supplanted by the proletariat or the working class.

According to Marxism there are certain contradictions and weaknesses within capitalism. These will cause great economic crises and impoverishment leading to depressing and worsening conditions for the working class, and the conditions will end up forcing the working class to rise and overthrow the capitalists and then assume control over the means of production. There will then follow a classless society in which the exploitative state will be replaced by one with a rational economic co-operation, with a fair and more equitable distribution of the national resources and the means of livelihood. The ultimate goal of Marxism is communism, the stage following after socialism when classes completely cease to exist and men become very happy. However, communism does not yet exist, and so the socialist countries in the world today are still in the phase of socialism where class struggle has not yet ended.

At this point the role of Lenin ought to be mentioned. Lenin, the Russian intellectual, devoted a great deal of his time to the study of Marxism. He is solely responsible for translating Marxist theory into practice in the twentieth century (Appignanesi 9). The brain behind the victory of the Proletarian Revolution in Russia in October 1917, Lenin formulated the philosophy now known as Marxism-Leninism, which is the theory of the proletarian liberation movement, or the theory and practice of the dictatorship of the proletariat (Rius 149).

Marxist-Leninist works have had a great impact on the psychology of modern man. They had made it clear that history is not made by great men alone, that the working class constitutes a force to be reckoned with, a powerful group with the potential to create events, to make history. This revelation imbues the proletariat with a sense of historical optimism (Parkhomenka and Myasnikov 12). "Marxism's goal is the liberation of consciousness, the freeing of praxis from bondage via revolutionary theory" (Solomon 14). Marxists believe that no successful revolution can take place without the ground work of ideological preparation and conscientization of the masses.

Our main concern being Marxist criticism, we had better state, as Maynard Solomon has done in his work, what may not be very obvious to many people, and that is that there is nothing like an original Marxist aesthetics (*Ibid*). And this is due to the fact that the founders of Marxism, Marx and Engels, never evolved any sustained theory of art and literature. They never left behind any fully developed aesthetic. Needless to say, had they done so, they would have made things easier for us attempting to grapple with Marxist criticism today; we would simply have been dealing with a clear-cut theory, with a fixed, if only a hackneyed and an over flogged, approach.

However, though they did not leave behind an elaborated theory of art, Marx and Engels did make comments and observations on art and literature in their writings. The history of Marxist aesthetics is an attempt by later scholars to apply Marxist ideas to art and literature. And this makes the subject more complex and difficult to grasp because the various applications do not compel universal consensus.

Generally, there are two orientations of Marxist criticism: On the one hand there are the so-called 'vulgar' Marxist critics who explore works of art solely for their ideological content and then relate it directly to class struggle in society; on the other there are the genuine Marxist critics who consider the dialectical relationship between content and form, even if they place a little more emphasis on content. In a general sense, thus, Marxist aesthetics is content-oriented.

But a genuine Marxist analysis of a text does not simply end at its ideological content, at a mere abstraction of ideology and relating it to class struggle. There is the aesthetic dimension as well; for, after all the formal elements of literature are the words that make up the language in which that literature is written. Therefore, whatever ideology a text embodies is subtly inscribed in the words and techniques, in the content of the text. For, as Eagleton puts it, "The languages and devices a writer finds to hand are already saturated with certain ideological modes of perception, certain codified ways of interpreting reality (*Marxism and Literary Criticism* 27).

At the risk of oversimplification, here are some of the central principles in Marxist criticism, ideas crucial to the evaluation of a work of art, especially one written from a socialist perspective. Realism, the genuine dialectical art form, is highly regarded in Marxist criticism. That is why Naturalism and Formalism are strongly attacked and scorned by Marxist critics. It is a basic tenet in Marxist criticism that literature or art is the social and historical product of the society producing it. In other words works of art are socially and historically conditioned. They are not just mysteriously inspired, or based solely on the psychology of their creators. A closely related principle is that no major literary work is conceived within an ideological vacuum; all art emanates from an ideological conception of the world. Therefore, to fully understand a work of art it is important to examine the total social process of which it is a part. Commitment of art is a fundamental principle in Marxist criticism. Art for art's sake is nonsense to Marxist critics; meaningful to them is art for life's sake. For Marxist critics, true characterisation should combine typicality and individuality (Ambanasom *Dregs of Humanity* 162).

There is a view that literature is nothing but ideology in artistic form; that literature simply reflects the dominant ideology(ies) of its epoch. The

other view holds that literature rather challenges the dominant ideologies of its societies. But both views need not be mutually exclusive. As Eagleton says authentic art always transcends the ideological limits of its time, yielding us insight into the realities which ideology hides from view.

Postmodernism emerged as a result of experimental movements in Western arts, architecture and cultural development¹. As a tool for social and political analysis it marks a shift from societies constructed by industrialisation to increasingly fragmented information societies. With postmodernism individuals have been transformed from producers to consumers; individualism replaces religious, class and ethnic loyalties (Heywood 323). Postmodernism does not accept that there are certain absolute universal truths. It considers any such claims as arrogant pretence. A critic with a strong bias for postmodernism or the postcolonial project will regard judgementalism as anathema; for these 'postal' theories are incompatible with issues of standardization or fixed systems of belief.

The Frenchman Jean François Lyotard sums up this postmodernist spirit as 'incredulity towards meta-narratives', meta-narratives being the universal theories of history that view society as coherent' (qtd. in Heywood 323). Some examples of meta-narratives are Marxism, Liberalism, Christianity, Islam, etc. The project of postmodernism therefore becomes the deconstruction of the centralised, logocentric master narratives of European culture (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 117). As Rice and Waugh observe,

at the base of postmodernist theory lies the recognition that we live in a pluralized culture; that we are surrounded by a multiplicity of styles, forms, discourses and narratives; and that we consume these as different life styles, knowledges, stories we tell ourselves about the world, and models we propose about reality (eds. 259).

Postmodernism should not, therefore, be regarded as one out of many styles, but rather as a collection of styles 'interanimated in the field of culture' (*Ibid*). Conveying his experience of contemporary cultural multiplicity, Jean François Lyotard posits that 'Eclecticism is the degree zero of comptemporary general culture' (qtd. in Rice and Waugh, eds. 259).

With regard to postmodernism as an aesthetic here is what postmodernists do when they encounter literary works (Barry 91): They discover postmodernist themes, tendencies and attitudes; they project fiction in which there is mixing of styles; they foreground intertextual elements (parody, pastiche, allusion); they foreground elements of 'narcissism' or self-reflexivity; they challenge the distinction between the

high and low culture and foreground, instead, texts which serve as a hybrid blend of the two.

Even though we discuss modernism only in Chapter 7 of this work, we can briefly state here what is common to both modernism and postmodernism, and what separates them. According to Jeremy Hawthorn, as reported by Peter Barry, 'fragmentation', a feature of 20th century art and culture enjoys a prominent place in both modernism and postmodernism. However, modernism and postmodernism project fragmentation in different moods:

The modernist features it in such a way as to register a deep nostalgia for an earlier age when faith was full and authority intact ... For the postmodernist, by contrast, fragmentation is an exhilarating, liberating phenomenon, symptomatic of our escape from the claustrophobic embrace of fixed systems of belief. In a word, the modernist laments fragmentation while the postmodernist celebrates it (83-84).

In addition, while modernism makes a clear difference between 'high' and 'popular' art, postmodernism jettisons such a distinction but rather glories in excess, in gaudiness and in "bad taste" mixtures of qualities' (84). In other words the difference is one of tone and attitude. While the modernist is judgemental and acutely aware of the distinction between 'high' and 'popular' art, with a sentimental bias for the former, the postmodernist sees no reason why both cannot be conflated. Indeed the postmodernist takes great delight in blending these contrasting aspects of art and culture. With regard to Anglophone Cameroon, outside fiction, this postmodernist spirit is best exemplified by the poetry and drama of Bate Besong, translating his desire to be free from the suffocating grip of an imperial system.

From all that we have said so far under the Socio-Artistic Approach, then, it makes sense to reiterate that what we refer to as the Socio-Artistic Approach, taken in its broadest sense, is actually an eclectic approach; it is a kind of overarching, 'umbrella' approach under which appear several 'technical' approaches, which, as we have said, will be called forth, depending on the discursive practice highlighted by the texts under study.

Given the large number of novels that we will be analysing in this study, it would be ill-advised for anyone to claim to employ a single critical approach capable of capturing the essence of all the works or throwing sufficient light on them. In view of the multiplicity of themes, ideological and cultural issues, styles and attitudes that will be emerging from these texts, we believe that no single critical approach will be able to catch,

within its narrowly designed net, all the various categories and sizes of fish found in the Anglophone fictional sea. In our view, any critical approach that claims to carry out such a task raises doubts about its claims and remains suspect. On the contrary, we think that only a judicious critical perspective, an enlightened eclectic model, like the Socio-Artistic Approach, encompassing several critical approaches, can reasonably do the job. In literary criticism eclecticism is the bringing together of various theories or critical discourses for the purpose of analysing literary works, in our case, the Cameroonian novels of English expression.

Some may well object that this amalgamation of approaches is only a cumbersome addition to many critical discourses that the critic is supposed to master. Others may ask how many of the approaches at his disposal should a critic apply when confronted with a novel, one, two, three or four? Or should he, in the interest of a democratic display of theoretical competence, evenly spread them across the text?

Well, we do not think so. We would go along with Peter Barry who says: ‘... for most readers one of these issues tends to eclipse all the rest ... These perspectives cannot be put on and off like a suit – they have to emerge and declare themselves with some urgency’ (Barry 198). We would like to stress that it is the creative work that inspires the type of approach suitable for its apprehension. To use our favourite hunting analogy in this regard:

The critic’s tools are his weapons at different times; ... a weapon presupposes a hunter on the one hand, and the game to be killed, on the other. The weapon may range from a broomstick to an automatic rifle, and the game from a fly to an elephant. Now, when a fly presents itself, the hunter uses a broomstick to bring it down; when a rat shows up, he uses a stick; when a bird comes his way, a catapult is enough. In the same way a gun is appropriate for an antelope, and an automatic rifle for an elephant. Let the weapon match the animal. It makes no sense to face the elephant with a broomstick, nor with a rifle to bring down a fly (Ambanasom *Education* 17).

Notes

1. For a discussion on Modernism see the treatment of the novels of Francis Nyamnjoh in Chapter 7 of this study.

Chapter Three

Encounter With Europe

It is a truism, in the history of African literature, that many early African writers whose novels are set in the colonial past were writing against a backdrop of negative Hegelian stereotypical ideas of Africa, victim of the twin evils of slavery and colonialism. In the 19th century, in particular, when European imperialism reached its apex, the image of Africa in the average European consciousness was one of a land of brutes and savages, of people with hardly a history and certainly no culture at all. Here, for example, is what a European intellectual of repute says of black Africa. The scholar is Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel who, in his famous book *The Philosophy of History* (1956) states: 'The Negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality – all that we call feeling – if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character ...' (93)

If the African/Negro is not a balanced human being to be associated with any trace of civilized behaviour, his continent, according to this German scholar, is not part of history either, as he pontificates a few pages later when he virtually reduces a whole continent to a historical footnote: 'At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit' (99). This was the Africa that justified European missionary intervention, 'mission civilisatrice', since these Europeans considered themselves the vectors of history and civilization (Obiechina 25). Here, in contrast, is a different German, August Seidel, who expresses great surprise at the African's ability to think or feel like a normal human being:

A wild African! A black beast! Fancy him actually thinking and feeling, his imagination proving creative! More than that even, fancy him with a sense and appreciation of poetic form, rhyme and rhythm! It sounds quite incredible, yet is true (...) everyone was amazed to find that the Negro thinks and feels as we ourselves think and feel (qtd. in Jua 147).

From the Hegelian evangelistic point of view, therefore, it was the Africa that became the 'white man's burden,' the Africa whose 'benighted souls' made the coming into Africa of European missionaries a moral imperative.

It was thus against this background of established European prejudices against Africa that novelists like Kenjo Jumbam, Chinua Achebe and others who have set their novels in the past wrote. But few African novelists have rationalised their roles as writers as Chinua Achebe has clearly done. And were they to do so, there is no doubt that many would agree with the Nigerian novelist when he felt that although several social and political issues were appropriate material for literature, the African novelist at a particular point in history ought to first dispose of one essential theme to correct this European myopic view of Africa:

This theme – put quite simply - is that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period, and it is this that they must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost (qtd. in Killam 8).

It could be argued that, in a sense, what Kenjo Jumbam has done in *The White Man of God* (1980)¹ is a contribution to the role mapped out by Achebe to rectify this European vision of Africa. It is an engaging human story of what happened when European Roman Catholic missionaries for the first time came into contact with the Nso traditional people of Cameroon. But the Nso people do not come across to the reader as mindless at all; nor do they appear to have heard of culture for the first time from the missionaries. On the contrary, the imagined real people sensitively presented to the reader are a people with a rich culture. Theirs is an organised society with a leader, the *Fon*, and his nobles who help him to rule his people; they have their own African belief system, with a supreme deity that can be accessed through ancestral spirits; they have rituals and ceremonies that they carry out in order to lead harmonious lives such as cleansing rites in case of incest and sacrifices of appeasement to the ancestors; they celebrate death and birth even through poetry; they carry out cohesive communal activities; they discipline those guilty of one moral infraction or the other; they revere the dead and treat their elders with deference; they enjoy life like other human beings anywhere.

Through the wise Yaya and other adult characters, Jumbam shows that these rural African characters have minds of their own as they engage in an ideological disputation. This indicates that the African characters are neither robots nor idiots. Lest someone should think that Jumbam is presenting angels, he also shows that like all human beings, the Nso people have their own human faults and foibles as illustrated by some anecdotes brought into the story to show that those who have become Christians are common sinners like many others. In short, in the African characters, the novelist has painted realistic human beings, no more no less, with a rich and interesting culture. He has painted a beautiful picture of a people whose traditional life and values are solid and valid as they allow them to live in harmony with one another.

What Jumbam has done through this imaginative recreation is his own individual vision of the traditional life of his people at a particular time in European imperial history when the Nso came into contact with a Roman Catholic priest – that white man of God. Thus whether consciously or unconsciously, it is his own corrective, imaginative response to the type of negative picture of Africa propagated by some biased Europeans as a land of people reduced more or less to animals.

Set in Nso in the North-West Province of Cameroon, *The White Man of God* (1980) therefore dramatises the consequences of early European Christian incursions into that part of Cameroon. The major theme explored is the clash of cultures. In the text we have two ideologically opposed camps: there are, on the one, the Nso people with their essentially African traditional ways, and on the other the European missionaries with their Western Christian values, the kind of archetypal meeting between Africa and Europe that Chinua Achebe so vividly and imaginatively reconstructs in his prototypical novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

Much of the conflict is played out within the family of the adolescent Tansa, the dominant focalizer of the narrative. It pits Tansa's Christian parents, Mama and Papa, against his ancestor-worshipping grandmother, Yaya, the epitome of African tradition, a clash clearly manifest in the contrasting lifestyles in the family. While Mama and Papa are doing their best to bring up their children in a Christian manner to be good Catholics, Yaya is just as eager to let them follow the way of her ancestors.

The ideological confrontation comes out in the manner Yaya carries out searching discussions, in turn, with her daughter and son-in-law. In the process the wise old woman raises some fundamental questions about Christian theology; indeed, at the centre of the novel, and from the traditional African point of view, is the disturbing issue of a loving God who can condemn sinners to hell fire forever. Yaya cannot fathom a loving

God who is, at the same time a cruel God. If a human parent, an inferior being, can beat his own child and yet soothe the child, so Yaya reasons, if a mother can discipline her child and still show pity towards her, surely a superior being like the Christian God cannot consign His own erring children into hell-fire forever:

No, no, no! I did not say that the father of children was lying to me. ...what I said was this that if a man said that God can punish someone forever and ever without pity, then that man is not the son of God for he is certainly telling a lie. God can punish a man for an evil action but certainly not for eternity. That is what I have been saying to the mother of these children but she just flares up at me each time ... Well, maybe I am old and can't reason, but I believe that God, like any father punishes and soothes, makes people suffer for their deeds but pardons when the punishment has lasted long enough (38-39).

The question of a loving but cruel God comes up in one way or the other each time Yaya's native intelligence confronts the imperial Christian mind. Earlier she had tried in vain to dissuade her Christian daughter from taking her children to join the new religion. Not even Yaya's wise analogy of the foolish partridge that led her chicks to perdition would move the staunch Christian that Mama is. However, Yaya makes the following declarations with the same effect on Mama:...

your new religion has impossible laws and its God is cruel. It is only the God of the white man who puts a man in hell-fire and lets him burn there like wood, never dying but crying there every day forever and ever while God never lifts up an eye of mercy to him. What cruelty to imagine of a God! Tell me, can you punish these children so? The other day you beat Beri and she cried and continued to cry for a long time. I sat quiet and said nothing and did nothing. Then you took her into your arms and consoled her and cleaned her eyes and gave her a banana. Why didn't you leave her to cry her eyes out? You felt like a mother and took her again to you. But you are leading her to where a God will put her in fire to burn and cry there all her life. Why do you join such a society? It teaches things which are very different from our people's beliefs (33).

If the aware reader were to analyse carefully Yaya's reasoning as it emerges in various shades in the novel, he would be left in no doubt that here is an essentially philosophical attitude. This means that she does not swallow things uncritically. She subjects the logic of an accepted truth (in this case the basic Christian idea that God is a loving father who nevertheless will punish sinners in hell-fire) to serious scrutiny. Where others would be satisfied Yaya raises questions; where some would rather be mute she criticises and disturbs consciences. This critical probing, this reasoning, is, in our humble view, a philosophical attitude. In the final analysis, then, Yaya's methodical questioning of the idea of a loving but cruel God, amounts to an interrogation of an imperial European theological belief from an African perspective, a confrontation of the grand narrative of the indigenous territory and the other grand narrative of the imperial West, a classic clash between the first and the second spaces, the result of which may well leave some faithful shaken to the very foundation of their faith.

Herein lies the social significance of Jumbam's novel, for it is equal to an African response, mediated through the medium of form, to imperial European denigration of the Negro as perpetrated by 19th century European intellectualism, which held that the Negro was a being irremediably trapped within the confines of 'the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state' with whom nothing reasonable, civilized or harmonious could be associated. To Jumbam's immediate community (Cameroon) the novel's resonance also lies in the fact that it is the first major Cameroonian novel of English expression written by a blue-blooded Anglophone Cameroonian and published by a reputable institution. It has become a classic in Cameroon almost in the same way that Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), upon publication, did in Nigeria or Africa as a whole.

Still at the thematic level an aspect of the external conflict reveals itself in the sharp exchanges between children belonging to various Christian faiths like the Baptist, the Roman Catholic or the Basel Mission. But the watershed of the broad ideological conflict pitting the African traditional practices against the Western Christian values comes when the Rev Father (Big Father) in anger, unmasks a juju in the profane view of the public only to discover to his greatest shock that the man behind the mask is none other than Matiu (Mathew) his own head catechist!

Big Father kicked and kicked the Kibarankoh and when it turned round to him he pushed off its big mask and then got the shock of his life. Face to face with the juju he would not believe his eyes.

'Mathew!'

'Father'

‘Mathew!’

‘Father’

Then he collapsed on the spot. The juju put on his mask and ran back to the palace wilder than ever’ (143)

In Mathew we have a classic hybrid, postcolonial subject in whom Roman Catholicism as a grand narrative fails to rewrite itself as a pure text. Mathew becomes the problematic figure of the third space, the hybrid subject caught within the in-betweeness that materialises between the first imperial space and the colonized narrative of the indigenous site. Hemmed in within these two hegemonies Mathew does not belong exclusively to any, but rather to both in a way that makes him less pure than the original occupants of the grand narrative of the imperial West, on the one hand, or the grand indigenous narrative of the village, on the other.

The shock suffered by the priest will eventually eliminate Big Father from the scene of action as an active participant, symbolising the power of African indigenous ways. In this confrontation of the second, colonized space versus the first imperial space, we have the deconstruction of the imperial narrative through the third space. If, in the Christian sense, Yaya, in spite of her criticism of the new religion, is saved by submitting herself to Christian baptism, Big Father, in the true African indigenous sense, is incapacitated by his audacity to confront and affront a mysterious power like Kibaranko, leaving the dominant, conflicting ideological forces at parity.

A literary work, according to Abiola Irele, ‘is a mediation of experience through the agency of form, to which the serious critic must be attentive’ (‘Literary Criticism’ 96). This means that what we have in Jumbam’s *The White Man of God*, for example, is far from just a lump of experience; rather there is some rhythm, some form or order imposed on the recreated experiences brought about in the novel. In other words there is technique involved in the mediation of the imaginative experiences. The central drama in the text is limited to one family, rather than between families; there is the central theme of tradition versus Christianity; and there is the ingenious conception of contrasting characters like Yaya, Big Father, etc.

Indeed, the art that informs *The White Man of God* proceeds from a restrained spirit essentially classical. Jumbam’s choice of words is simple and economical, and his sentences are often short and felicitous. The story is focalized through the consciousness of Tansa (the first-person narrator) whose tone of voice, surprisingly for an adolescent is subdued, analytical, searching and convincing. Even though the story is thus narrated by Tansa who, at appropriate moments then conjures other characters to come alive on the page to add drama to his tale, one should not forget the self-effaced creator of this technique, Kenjo Jumbam, who has maintained his aesthetic distance.

Jumbam is not in a hurry to state a truth. He takes his time to develop a scene carefully, completely and, hence, realistically by choosing the appropriate words, the right expression and phrase to string out an unambiguous sentence. The result is the evocation of human experience that rings true, that carries a compelling air of verisimilitude and inevitability.

His characters are realistically constructed, particularly Yaya and Tansa, on the one hand, and Big Father and Father Cosmas, on the other. As evident even in the quotations above, Yaya is patient, wise, reasonable, analytical and philosophical. But like many traditional Africans, she is superstitious. Occasionally in the text she brings in an anecdote to buttress her reasoning, to support her argument or point she is putting across, for example, the pertinent analogy of the foolish partridge and her chicks (33), the insightful illustration of a long and overdue punishment with the Luko-Komi story, (39), and the fitting parallel with the thief who stole Lukong's goats (54).

With regard to Tansa, the author depicts him sensitively, making him behave just as a normal adolescent of his age should. He skilfully exposes the psychological states of mind of a growing child under strong Christian influences in a traditional environment. Tansa's burgeoning but perfectly natural sexual attraction to the beautiful Lucy does not escape the reader's attention. We are aware of Tansa's fears of the consequences of sinning; we notice the pains and worries occasioned in him by the dreadful thought of being found out for having taken part in a pagan sacrifice. Indeed, his own severe self-criticism, after he has eaten of the sacrificial chicken, his retrospective, self-reflexive statements and questions virtually amount to self-flagellation (20-21). This is realistic behaviour for a sensitive Christian adolescent of the likes of Tansa.

The sensitivity and understanding with which Jumbam handles his African characters does not desert him when he comes to the European ones. Big Father and Father Cosmas are types realistically portrayed; the one is a foil for the other. Big Father, tough, stern and fearless, is a disciplinarian who gets things done. But the Africans obey him purely out of fear of spiritual perdition likely to result from his vehement curses rather than out of genuine respect for the man. Though very committed to his missionary work, Big Father is a recluse who, the moment he is not actively involved in his evangelistic duty, retires indoors, scarcely socializing with his indigenous faithful.

But far from demonising him, Jumbam makes Big Father a realistic human being when the stern Rev yields to the women's plea for him to forgive Lukar's Mother whom he had earlier cursed for interrupting his sermon with her fit of coughing. There is even a rumour that this hard man of God has had sex with the young and beautiful Lucy.

But if Big Father generally stays aloof from the people, Father Cosmas, in contrast, mixes freely with them, eats their local food, learns to speak their language, entertains them with his gramophone, and introduces games to attract the young natives to school and the church. He is warm, generous and sociable, and, therefore, one who endears himself to the people. He is the type who makes people work out of respect and admiration for him. The contrast between the two priests comes out even in their respective first sermons to the Christians. Big Father's initial sermon is condemnatory and uncompromising, part of which is 'sex, sex and drink; drink, drink, and sex; that is what one hears in the confessions. That is all you know; that is all you are capable of' (59). And to Lukar's mother whose annoying paroxysm of coughing interrupts his homily, he blurts out: 'To hell – to hell – to hell' (59). Father Cosmas, in contrast, is a more sensitive preacher whose sermon gets the full attention of the people.

Father Cosmas was a marvellous preacher and the people listened with open mouths to his preaching because he always gave such fitting examples. Whenever he saw something wrong and wanted to preach against it, he did not say that it happened there. He wove it into a story and said that he saw it in some other place. He was not like Big Father who would blame everybody for the fault of an individual (112).

In *The White Man of God* Jumbam successfully resolves the critical issue of cultural documentation and artistic narration, achieving a fine balance between portraying his culture and remaining faithful to his art. This often entails a judicious selection of appropriate sociological material relevant to ceremonies linked to death, birth and ritual sacrifices. The sociological material is neither so scanty as to be irrelevant, nor so much as to overwhelm the reader and stifle the human dimension of the tale, but just enough to give the story a realistic cultural cushioning and ample space for it to run its full course. While he pays an enduring tribute to the cultural legacy of the Nso people, Jumbam does not lose sight of the fact that, before anything else, he is, first and foremost an artist, a novelist committed to telling a story and telling it well.

The birth of twins, in Nso traditional society as, indeed, in many indigenous communities in Cameroon, is an occasion for celebration and joy. This contrasts markedly with the Ibo tradition of the distant past where, as Achebe depicts in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) twins are considered accursed beings destined to be dumped in the 'evil forest'. In Jumbam's novel the birth of twins by her daughter is an occasion for Yaya to be lifted to the

level of rhapsody, to eulogize those bringing home the children. Here, for example, is Yaya waxing lyrical as she welcomes the twins discharged from the mission hospital along with their parents and other relatives:

‘Maria’.

‘Yaya’.

‘You are welcome, you are welcome smart girl, you are welcome,’ she kept on saying,

‘You are welcome.’

‘Biy Wibah.’

‘Yaya.’

‘Welcome, my child, daughter of our people. I wish I had your strength. Eh, princess of the star kingdom, you have carried our baby?’

‘Yes Yaya.’

“Softly dear, softly; mind your foot, don’t put it against anything hard. Dear daughter of our people, how smart you are. Welcome, softly my dear, softly;

‘Father of children,’ she said to Papa.

‘Yaya.’

‘Eeeee – take my hand, tiger-of-the-hills, take my hand, take my hand; eeee – crown of my age, lion of the woods. Let those who ask what I am come and see my line streaming from the gods.’

Papa simply smiled and went to his house. Then Yaya danced to Mama and embraced her and danced in front of her around her. Then she held Mama’s shoulders and looked into her face.

‘Lalav,’ she called.

‘Yaya.’

‘Is this you really?’ she asked. Mama laughed.

‘She laughs like sunshine,’ Yaya said dancing in front of her. ‘She laughs like lightning; daughter of the river-god; do I deceive myself that Lalav is my daughter? Where is Ndze to see his line extending? Ndze is coming back to me through my daughter.’ Ndze was her husband (66).

With Yaya’s ‘line streaming from the gods’ and her husband’s extending, and with Ndze ‘coming back’ to Yaya, the couple’s immortality is virtually guaranteed, thanks to the continuity made possible by the offspring. Thus posterity and immortality are the subjects of her celebration, the springboard of her beautiful lyricism. Poetry, oral poetry especially, is a divine gift to the African indigenous people as, indeed, it is a present from God to all humans in traditional societies.

Though in English, what Yaya utters here is in Lamnso, the local language of the Nso people. It is only an English transliteration whose beauty, nevertheless, comes across to the reader. One can only imagine the full force of the same rhapsody in the original Lamnso. But if joy is the stimulus of oral poetry, so is sadness or solemnity as conveyed by the orality of the solemn cleansing rite performed in the wake of the incest committed by Dinni and Biy Wibah. The central participants are the male human performer and the clubbed, sacrificial goat as the novelist makes effective use of onomatopoeia:

Then, raising up the club he brought it down with all his might on the he-goat saying, 'Go! Go to where you came from!'
Pom! Fell the club. Mba-a-ah! Bleated the goat.
'You've strayed too far'.
Pom! Mba-a-ah!
'Let smoke go to those who make fire'.
Pom! Mba-a-ah!
'Let the curse go to the land of the cursed'.
Pom! Mba-a-ah!
'Our hands are free from this mess.'
Pom! Mba-a-ah!
'We fling the mess back on those who threw it at us'.
Pom! Pom! Mbre-er-er ...
'Let him that carries shit himself endure its smell.'
Pom! Pom! Pom! The he-goat kicked its legs, stretched out its tongue and died ... (73-74).

From the above quoted passage we notice how the novelist successfully captures on paper the natural sounds made by the club landing on the sacrificial goat, on the one hand, and the bleating of the flogged animal, on the other. The beauty of the ritualistic rhythm lies in the nice alternation of the short, onomatopoeic lines with the long, cadenced utterances of the performer who inflicts pain on the goat.

In her article 'Contact and Conflict in *The White Man of God*', Mary Penrith (1982) dismisses the final chapter of the novel, (Chapter 21), as irrelevant. According to her

the chapter introduces new characters, but adds nothing that the reader really needs to know. Indeed, it seems more like the embryo of another novel than the conclusion to this one... I would therefore prefer to see the novel end on page 144, at the end of Chapter 20,

with the comment that nobody knew why or what had happened. Without Chapter 21, it seems to me that *The White Man of God* belongs among the great African novels in English (414).

But is Chapter 21 of *The White Man of God* really no more than an insignificant attachment to the novel as Penrith claims? Is there nothing intentional about it? We believe, on the contrary, that in the scheme of things within the imaginative composition, Chapter 21 has an artistic function. We are convinced that in the creation of specific situations and the crafting of well-chosen characters to re-enact the basic ideological conflict in the novel, the author evinces a clear design (intention) behind the work and that this deliberate, guiding thought helps to impel the imaginative material logically towards the significant argument voiced in Chapter 21 by Tansa's parents and Maria, all of whom are staunch Christians who have not yet sloughed off their African indigenous skins. They make a case for the dreadful, mystical forces within the African traditional belief system, one of which, in their view, has cast an evil spell on Big Father when he dared to desecrate the dreaded Kibaranko. Of course the enlightened, objective critic knows that the condition of the unconsciousness of Big Father is the consequence of a psychological shock, but the rural folk give it a more palatable interpretation. And coming from convinced Christians, the utterances underscore, even more persuasively, the place the African mystical forces occupy in the psyche of the indigenous, postcolonial characters like Moses Unachukwu in Achebe's *Arrow of God* or Isaac Okonkwo in *No Longer at Ease*. We cite here portions of three related declarations, beginning with that of Mama:

Mama was preparing the morning meal when I returned from church. She was shocked when I told her that Big Father had been carried away in a vehicle.

'You see what I was telling you last evening?' She said:
'I should keep my mouth shut even if it itches to talk.'

'You don't mean to say that there is anybody who doesn't know that the juju is a man, Mama,' I said.

'Everybody knows that and many people saw what happened yesterday. The question is, who are saying so? Who admit that they saw what you say? If you continue, I warn you, you might develop a rattling head and eat shit. If you think that knowing the white man's language makes you better than the juju men, then you must be very stupid to think that you know better than the white man himself.'

‘That is what I was saying, Mama. I am saying that it is unchristian to admit that the juju was not a man. And that the juju yesterday was Pa Matiu the catechist. I was there and I saw it.’

‘Quite right. It is unchristian to think that any juju is not a man. Are you more a Christian than big Fadda? He saw the juju whoever it was, but where is he now? Well, if you want to say such things be careful and ... We say that the disease that attacked cocoa can also attack coffee’ (145).

When Papa is told that Tansa is behaving as if he were a stranger to the ways of the Nso people, this is what he says to him:

‘When God condemned Satan to hell he did not take away his power and so Satan remains very powerful. There is magic and there are herbs that have wonderful power. If you have not studied them, people can use them to harm you. Mere herbs mixed in certain proportions can work wonders. These are facts which the White Man of God did not know. You don’t read such things in books. They are things of this land and those who worship the land can do them. The White Man of God exposed the secret of the juju. If someone had told him this before he wouldn’t have believed it. Now he knows it and will not doubt it again when he hears about it, that is, if he lives and his head remains normal. If you want to share his fate, venture to talk about it and you will see. And I must warn you; I haven’t the goats and chicken to run about paying the men to cure you when you’ve brought it on yourself’ (145-146).

Maria, a girl who has lived in Tansa’s family for long and now is the wife of Mr. Langwa, reacts essentially the same way when she hears Tansa talking carelessly about the fate that has befallen Big Father:

‘Son of my mother, don’t talk about it to anyone, you hear me? Don’t say what you saw or members of that juju society will undo you. Things like this make one wonder whether Satan is more powerful than God. How can God’s own messenger see the juju and fall down dead or half dead?’ (148).

That Roman Catholicism has made inroads in Nso land, it goes without saying; many people, including even staunch Africans like Yaya, have been converted into the Christian faith. A vector of development, the Catholic Church has constructed schools and hospitals, thus taking care of not only the people’s souls and minds, but of their bodies as well. Yet for all this important transformation of their lives, the Nso people remain essentially African, still very much under the strong influence of their African cultural

beliefs as seen from the above quotations. Though Christians, these postcolonial Africans are not ready to make a bold attack on the core of Nso culture as Big Father has done; for, in their view, there are still mystical forces that cannot be accounted for, nor can they be challenged with impunity.

Kibaranko's crippling impact on Big Father indicates that African tradition and world view cannot be facily brushed aside. Therefore, Chapter 21 is pertinent in this that it helps artistically to put forward this concluding view. In this regard John Mbiti's words on the subject of African mystical forces are instructive: 'This mystical power is not fiction: whatever it is, it is a reality, and one with which African peoples have to reckon. Everyone is directly or indirectly affected, for better or for worse, by beliefs and activities connected with this power, particularly in its manifestation as magic, sorcery and witchcraft' (198).

Therefore, in shaping his imaginative material to end with the prominent final view emerging from Chapter 21 with regard to some abiding aspects of the African culture, Kenjo Jumbam, to a certain extent, is writing in accordance with certain rhetorical principles. The latter generally hold that, in the art of composition, the emphatic word comes at the end of the sentence; the emphatic sentence at the end of the paragraph; the emphatic paragraph at the end of the chapter, and the emphatic chapter at the end of the book. In the words of William Strunk and E.B White (1979), 'The principle that the proper place for what is to be made most prominent is the end applies equally to the words of a sentence, to the sentences of a paragraph, and to the paragraphs of a composition' (33). Thus Chapter 21 is not as irrelevant as Penrith would want us to believe; the concluding opinion issuing from it is one rhetorically constructed to reverberate in our minds, a technique that lends the novel emphatic thematic resonance.

According to Penrith 'The ultimate tragedy of the novel seems to be that the two religions cannot be reconciled, even in the baptism of Yaya' (412). In our humble opinion the artistic flaw in this novel rather resides in the less than satisfactory conversion of Yaya to Christianity. After successfully constructing Yaya as the epitome of African traditional religion, African culture and all it incarnates in the indigenous sense; after convincingly showing us how Yaya philosophically challenges or questions Christian theology by raising serious questions about the nature of a loving but cruel Christian God who can punish people in hell fire forever, it is anti-climactic to make a U-turn to try to persuade us to believe in the conversion into Christianity of this staunch Africanist. Though the conversion is not sudden, though it is reasonably developed, it is not totally convincing. Just as Big Father had left the scene a stern, uncompromising

Christian, so could Yaya have been allowed in her own camp, the crucible of African traditional values. After all, Christianity even in its most effective form could not boast of winning the hearts of all heathens; even in these modern days of ours it is yet to achieve such a feat.

The next Anglophone Cameroonian literary text that deals with the theme of Africa's encounter with imperial Europe is Joseph A. Ngongwikuo's *Taboo Love* (1980)². However, moving from Jumbam's *The White Man of God* to Ngongwikuo's *Taboo Love*, the sensitive reader cannot but notice that, for all their thematic similarity, both texts are, artistically speaking, worlds apart with regard to the handling of characterization and the use of sociological material. From this conspectus Ngongwikuo's text will seem to emerge second rate. Set in the Kom country in the North-West Province of Cameroon, *Taboo Love* is the tale of star-crossed lovers, Jam and Iyafi. Jam is a young man who has fallen in love with his childhood friend, Iyafi, now a *Wintoc*, the wife of His Highness, the *Foyin* of the Mukomangoc ethnic group. Theirs is therefore a taboo love because, according to tradition, it is a grievous crime for any man to make love to a *Wintoc* (119-120).

So, for having had sexual intercourse, the young lovers are condemned to death by a powerful patriarchal gerontocracy. Jam is gruesomely and methodically amputated. His dismembered limbs and remaining torso are shoved into a nearby grave dug for the purpose (125-127). Iyafi escapes this macabre treatment only because she is discovered to be pregnant. However, the distraught woman cannot survive without her lover, and as a result, she commits suicide. But the coming of the Roman Catholic Church and then of the German and later, the British colonial administrators with their superior 'gun' power, puts an end to some of the cruel and inhuman practices of the 'tribe.'

Much of the novel is devoted to cultural exhibition, an ethnographic display involving a detailed depiction of the customs and traditions of the Kom people. One of the themes emerging from the text is therefore that of the richness and diversity of Kom culture. One thing very dear to the author is the desire to sell Kom culture abroad, to immortalize their customs and traditions. This much is clear from the ebullience and enthusiasm that characterize the depth of his cultural documentation as well as from the following declaration by the author: 'I wanted to write something meaningful from my own experience. I know I wanted to write about the Kom people, their customs, way of worship, religious conflicts, etc. I wanted to show other people how my own people lived. I saw many of the customs myself and learned of others through the oral tradition' (De la Taille, Werner and Tarkang 16).

However, the central theme of the novel is the tyranny of tradition over youthful love, the impotence of young lovers in the face of patriarchal conservatism. From the moment Jam takes the fateful step to go beyond merely looking at Iyafi with a leer and to make love to her, he knows he has irremediably condemned himself to certain death. Phrased differently, this very theme could be: cruelty, thy name is tradition. And the type of love that would frontally challenge such a formidable tradition so that a man, caught in the grip of passion, would rather prefer to love and die than to live and regret forever for not having loved, can only be qualified as powerful love, indeed. Through these lovers, the author, though a lover of tradition, is delivering a serious interrogation of some of the barbaric aspects of their rich culture that need re-evaluation.

Though the taboo lovers die in Part I of the novel, the author successfully introduces another pair of lovers in Part III, sustaining thus the love theme through the relationship between Nkwi and Futanga. Nkwi is a young man who himself falls in love with another *Wintoc* called Futanga. However, for the latter lovers who are Christians, things have changed for the better since the laws of the 'tribe' have been broken; for things have fallen apart. The church and the powerful colonial administration before whom the *Foyin* is now impotent are behind the young Christian lovers whose wedding is conducted without a hitch.

The story of the novel is enthusiastically told from the third person omniscient point of view. But in several portions of the text, the narrative is focalized from the consciousness of Iyafi, Jam or the *Foyin* etc, a diversity in narrative perspective that is more refreshing than a long, single point of view. In Chapter Eleven (43-51) for example, the author introduces Iyafi's father as an excellent oral performer. Here, around a typical traditional African bonfire and surrounded by his wives and children, on the eve of the cleansing of the 'tribe', this family head dramatically recounts the oral history of the foundation of the 'tribe' of Mukomangoc. At appropriate moments during this entertainment, he probes, he shouts and he questions; but he equally solicits questions from his audience, and tolerates interruptions and interjections from them, all of which techniques are his own way of sustaining the interest of his audience, keeping them awake and alert, especially children whose attention span is likely to wane. There is thus a lively interaction between the performer and the audience (44-45).

The Kom indigenous society described in the text is one that is well organized, at the head of which is the *Foyin*. His Highness is surrounded by his nobles, title holders, elders and village heads who help him to rule the 'tribe'. The *Foyin* has his own warriors, *chindos* who constitute his army. There is also a judicial body, made up of elderly men, that takes care of

settling disputes and differences between the indigenes. According to their system of religious belief, the Chief Priest acts as an intermediary between the people on the one hand, and the Great God, on the other, passing through the agency of the gods. Lyrical petitions or invocations like that on page 55, are made to the Great God to provide the people with abundant harvest, meat, and fertility to the women of the “tribe”.

The people assemble in the market square to hear the response of the appeal made through *bobe kwifon* who rhythmically delivers the ancestors’ positive message of a promise to grant the inhabitants all their wishes (65). Similarly, the Kwifon can deliver any important announcement from His Highness like the latter’s seasonal visits of the ‘tribe’.

A strong believer in cultural nationalism, in the propagation of the traditions of his Kom people, the novelist successfully incorporates elements of oral tradition in his text. Examples include the riddles asked by Iyafi prior to the narration of the oral history of the tribe by her father (41-42), the dramatic account of the history of the tribe itself (43-51), the lyrical petitions or invocation to the Great God (55), the rhythmic announcements by the Kwifon (65), the give – and – take lyrical exchange between the spokesman of the tribe and the juju executioner during the execution of Jam on page 125-127, and the lyrical rendition of Iyafi’s grief on page 130:

Weeee – Jam
What’s this myst’ry, I know,
I cannot solve?
What is love – my lover dear?
What need I do?
Where are you, dear one?
Where are you, dear?
I wish I knew it was so hard,
To miss your company so.
Jam, it’s hard, dear.
It’s hard for me alone.
Why was there love?
Cruel love, why are you so cruel to me?
Let me know thy bidding, love.
Because I can no more stand.
Wicked love! Cruel love! Wild love.
Why did you lay this trap for me?
Wherein I lie a helpless victim.
And muse over my misfortune.
Had I known what it is to love,

I surely would never have loved.
For love is only true in the presence of its partner.
My memories of love are memories of you, Jam.
And they eat my heart away.
Why can't I forget?
Why can't I sleep?
Why can't I see?
But only dream.
In fruitless hope and fantasy,
I deceive myself to live.
Now that you are gone, Jam.
Now that you are gone, dear.
I'll surely die and meet you in that Great Beyond.
In the land of our ancestors.
Where love by lovers,
May still be meant for us. (130)

This is ample proof that the people live with poetry. Whether in joy, in solemnity or sadness there is poetry of oral nature surrounding their everyday activities, an element that brings a great deal of relief to the reader in a novel devoted to extensive cultural documentation, especially the painting of static cultural pictures.

The author's handling of the love affair between Jam and Iyafi, even though not entirely convincing, is in places, interesting. The high points of their relationship are very moving, and the punishment meted out to them, though loathsome, is realistic and logical in the context of the reactionary cultural demands. Particularly arousing is the boldness with which Jam faces the conservative judges of the tribe (119-120); and touching is the manner in which Iyafi expresses her thoughts, sorrow and emotions in the wake of the execution of her sweet heart. Her grief, in this instance, finds a lyrical vent on page 130 already quoted above.

If these are some of the artistic strong points of the novel, the weaknesses of the work are only too obvious. The African literary text that Ngongwikwo seems to interrogate most is Chinua Achebe's classic, *Things Fall Apart* (1958) which, like *Taboo Love*, is divided into three parts, corresponding to the triadic dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, a structural resemblance that invites some comparison, however briefly. In both novels, Part I deals respectively with the Ibo and Kom society in their original purity without disruptive imperial intrusion, Part II respectively with the coming of the white men/red men and the consequent conflict of cultures, and Part III with some kind of resolution of the tension created by this European colonial incursion.

But while Part III of Achebe's text ends logically and realistically with the death of the uncompromising Okonkwo, Ngongwikuo's text ends on a note of incongruous atavism. After clearly showing us how some of the negative cultural practices of the 'tribe' have been symbolically dismantled by the Roman Catholic Church through Futunga's wedding and the colonial administration (the District Officer has criticized them himself) the author concludes his novel with the virtual reversion to pre-colonial values. And it is in the sense that the conservative *Foyn*, His Highness, has been given 'his independence to rule his people the way he had before the red men came' (188). To us this is an illogical conclusion following what Mountbatten has done to the *Foyn*.

If the absolute Monarch has to govern his subjects as he did prior to the coming of the colonialists, does it not mean the deconstruction of some of the positive imperial achievements? Does this not amount to a call for a reversion to past primitivism? Would he not, for example, reinstate the reactionary tribal law that makes it a grievous crime punishable by death for any man to fall in love with a *Wintoc*? Would His Highness, for his own selfish-interest not resort to arbitrary choice of *Wintocs* and *Chindos*, an attitude criticized by the D.O. himself?

Even if this novel's place in the history of the Anglophone Cameroonian novels is assured, its ending, artistically speaking, is far from reassuring. The most glaring artistic flaw of the text is the novelist's inept handling of cultural material. If, as we have seen in *The White Man of God*, sociological stuff serves Kenjo Jumbam, in *Taboo Love* it would seem to overwhelm Ngongwikuo. It should be stressed, however, that there is nothing wrong in using cultural material in a novel or any other genre, for that matter; it has been used before by other writers more or less successfully to give their work a sense of local colour.

It is a question of judgment in the context of the overall artistic design, an issue of proportion or balance vis-à-vis the story the novelist has to tell. After everything a novelist is an artist whose first duty is to tell his story and tell it well. And telling his story within a cultural milieu, the creative writer must critically and firmly exercise his sense of discrimination and proportion in the selection of his sociological lore, knowing what to include or exclude, when, and how much.

But with Ngongwikuo, as evident in *Taboo Love*, his cultural mission is a step or two ahead of his artistic task; the ethnological documentation is in excess of the love story that gives the novel its title. There is a definite disproportion between the cultural material and the human story emerging from it, with the sociological drawing too much attention to itself.

For example, the love story between Jam and Iyafi starts off well and is captivating until page 42. But from pages 43 to 108, the lovers' trial by the judicial body of the 'tribe' is suspended because, for about 70 long pages, the novelist must feed the reader with cultural stuff relating to the cleansing of the 'tribe', the tours of the villages by the *Fojyn*, celebrations, ceremonious rituals, the choice of *wintocs* and *chindos*, award of titles, settling of disputes, etc. Indeed, so overwhelming is this cultural documentation that, at times, the reader is under the impression that he is reading not a novel but a sociological tract. And when this happens, the novelist suffers a setback in his artistic mission (75-6; 92-3).

The sociological and artistic imbalance of the author's handling of his material, particularly in Part I of the text, is only an aspect of his improper control of the novelistic material. The other resides, even from the surface value of it, in the basic structure of the novel into three parts, a structural design heavily skewed in favour of Part I. For example, for a work that is 188 pages long, Part One alone covers for itself the huge chunk of 135 pages, Part Two only 25 pages, and Part Three merely 21 pages, a statistic that betrays, the writer's impatience to quickly wrap up his fictional endeavour, especially as he has fulfilled his cultural mission in the substantial Part One of his novel. Besides, if in Part One the artist has been dislodged by the sociologist, in Parts Two and Three, his role has been usurped by that of the historical chronicler; for in these latter parts we notice a tendency in the novelist to recount rather too closely the raw material of history: the initial encounter between Europeans and Cameroonians from the Kom country with reference to missionary, colonial and military activities (167-8; 174, and 188):

The two expected priests arrived, Father James Hans and Father Ralph Anderson. They both came from the Mill Hill Society in London. Father Hans was from Holland and Father Anderson from England. Father Hans, though Dutch, had received his education in England and so spoke English without an ascent. Father Fink immediately appointed Father Hans for the new mission in the Mukomangoc tribe in the village of Ijinikom. (174) ... Young men came from both the Christian and the pagan groups, and one hundred young men were handed over to the District Officer, who took them over to Capitol Hill, Atuisong, and they were transported by car down to Victoria and later by boat to the Far East where they fought in the jungle wars in Burma and in Japanese held lands during the Second World War. (188)

As already intimated, after reading Jumbam's *White Man of God*, one need not be a genius to discover that Ngongwikuo's *Taboo Love* is not a text strong on characterization. The reader hears about the central characters but does not see them sufficiently enough; so, they are not adequately implanted in his imagination. Bole Butake and Nalova Lyonga (1982) are right when they affirm, with reference to the not-so-convincing love relationship between the main characters that

it is even more unacceptable that people who are in love, who belong to the same tribe and live in the same area do not seem to know what has become of each other: Iyafi does not know where Jam lives; and Jam does not know that Iyafi has become a *wintoc* ... It is difficult to convince oneself that people who have not bothered about each other until a storm brings them together should suddenly wish to sacrifice their life in the name of love (165).

Any reader, even a casual one, of *Taboo Love*, will not fail noticing the obsessive use of the word 'tribe' by the author. This practice calls forth the following observation: Either Ngongwikuo did not seem to be aware of the negative connotations this word conjures in the imagination of Westerners, or he was simply pandering to the wishes of his publishers to come out with a piece palatable to the taste of his American readership. For to belabour the word 'tribe', as Ngongwikuo has done in his text, would be playing into the hands of Westerners, and validating some of their prejudices about Africa as a place containing brutes and sub-humans, people running wildly around, throwing spears, brandishing machetes and grinning idiotically. This is a word that no self-respecting African/Cameroonian writer, particularly in the 21st century can use the way Ngongwikuo has done.

With Azanwi Nchami's *Footprints of Destiny* (1985)³ we come to the third Anglophone Cameroonian imaginative work that deals substantially with the subject of Africa's sad collision with Europe, but this time, a more radical confrontation of sorts; for, in the central drama that unfolds, pitting Kamerunian nationalism against German imperialism 'the edifice of colonial Africa starts cracking' (the blurb). In this fictional recreation we have some of the early beginnings of anti-colonial nationalism in African fiction. The novel is set in Africa and Europe, and historically covers the period from late 19th century to the end of the First World War.

Its hero is the Kamerunian nationalist, Martin Paul Samba, German educated and captain in the German overseas army. His special colonial task is the 'pacification of recalcitrant tribes who still opposed German rule in Kamerun', an assignment he eagerly embraces, especially as he sees

in it an opportunity to settle a few scores with some of his own jealous Bullu people who had earlier murdered his beloved father. The text's heroine is Zara, a Bantu princess born in Katanga and a formidable Amazon in her country's all-female army. She is fated to be captured by Nguni, a Zulu warrior chief, and to become his lover and companion in arms against the Boers; and, then later, following Nguni's demise, destined, through a curious set of intervening historical circumstances, to become the lover and supporter of the Kamerunian nationalist.

At one time the Germans' golden-haired boy and a devil in the eyes of his countrymen (66), Martin Paul Samba had since made a U-turn, largely on account of his frustrated affair with the daughter of his German benefactor, and now become the *bête noire* of the Germans. Supported by the Douala traditional ruler, Rudolph Douala Manga Bell, Martin Paul champions the cause of the exploited Kamerunians against German colonialism. Unfortunately, these leaders are arraigned and later executed by the Germans who had intercepted their letters to the outside powers for help, on the verge of the outbreak of the First World War. The text's central subject matter is thus colonialism.

By its very nature a vicious exploitative system, colonialism is an extension of political and economic control over an area by an occupying state often with organizational and technological superiority. In most cases, for economic and social reasons, the nationals of the occupying state migrate to the colony for the improvement of their lot. But as Edward W. Said says, "Neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination" (8).

From this conspectus, the colonizer and the colonized subject can hardly see eye to eye. In fact often they are, culturally speaking, miles apart. According to Abdul R Jan Mohamed,

Motivated by his desire to conquer and dominate, the imperialist configures the colonial realm as a confrontation based on differences in race, cultural values and modes of production.

Faced with an incomprehension and multifaceted alterity, the European theoretically has the option of responding to the Other in terms of identity or difference. If he assumes that he and the Other are essentially identical, then he would tend to ignore the significant divergences and to judge the Other according to his own cultural values. If, on the other hand, he assumes that the Other is irremediably different, then he would have little incentive to adopt the view point

of that alterity: he would again tend to turn to the security of his own cultural perspective. Genuine and thorough comprehension of Otherness is possible only if the self can somehow negate or at least severely bracket the values, assumptions, and ideology of his culture. (18)

Given the raw realities of colonialism, it is difficult for us to conceive of a colonizer who will see the colonized Other through lenses other than tainted ones, in a way other than one that pictures the self as superior and the Other as inferior. Indeed such is invariably the case within the African colonial context. For, as Florence Stratton (1994) says, 'Jan Mohamed, following Fanon, characterizes colonial society as a Manichean structure organized according to a racial allegory – an allegory of white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority' (15).

Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines 'Manicheism' or 'Manicheism' as 'a dualistic interpretation of the world dividing it between good and evil powers' (1375). Thus, textualizing the colonial society as a 'Manichean' structure is to look at it from the perspective of binary polarities in terms of hierarchy of values: good/evil, superiority/inferiority, civilized/native, us/them, self/other/subject/object, white/black, and intelligent/emotional. We find these binarisms a useful paradigm through which we can examine *Foot Prints of Destiny*, a post-colonial text.

By far the greatest site of conflict between the German colonialists and the colonized Kamerunians is undeniably the land issue, the expropriation of the lands of the Douala indigenes, the coastal inhabitants of Kamerun who had the first contact with the imperial Europeans. But after signing a treaty with the Douala chiefs in which the local rulers are recognized as the custodians of their lands, the Germans still go ahead to expropriate the lands. Speaking on behalf of his people, King Rudolph Douala Manga Bell, one of the central characters of the novel, is scandalized when he learns of the German design. He is blunt and forthright when he faces the German Governor of the Protectorate:

Governor Theodor Seitz blinked through rimless eye glasses at the Douala chief looking expectantly at him across the office desk. 'I'm afraid the rumours you've heard are true, Your Highness'. 'But, Goddammit Seitz', Rudolph's fist hit the table top loudly. 'The German Government cannot do this to us — not after all the concessions we've made to them. What? Expropriate our land? Dispossess us? You just hate our guts don't you? The Douala people have been the biggest thorn in your white flesh ever since you annexed

our country, haven't they? They are proud people. They are your commercial rivals. They refused to pay your taxes. They have consistently refused to work on your plantations; they have refused to become your beasts of burden. In short, they refute your assumption of racial superiority over them (64).

At the end of their tête à tête we learn that Governor Seitz has been recalled home to Germany. King Rudolph Manga Bell enjoins him to make it clear to his government, especially the Kaiser and his Chancellor that the Douala will not tolerate any high-handedness on the part of the Germans. He warns the Germans to steer clear of the Douala people who will not yield an inch of their land unless on their own terms, and that the people are ready to fight to the last man to defend their patrimony. Before the year runs out, a new Governor, Otto Gleim, is sent to Kamerun. Two months later, Rudolph, accompanied by Pastor Lotin Same, is in Otto Gleim's Office, only to get the shock of his life, and one that will radicalize him and, eventually, all patriotic Kamerunians galvanized against the colonialists.

The new Governor, Otto Gleim, two months old in Kamerun, cleared his throat. 'The decree you're holding in your hand just arrived from Berlin.' Rudolph held up the paper in question and read out loud, 'Decision to move Natives from Douala to a New Location separated from Europeans by one kilometre. In order to prevent land speculation and also improve health conditions for Europeans, it has been decided ...' Rudolph let the document flutter from his fingers to the floor, 'If living side by side with us natives is a health hazard for you,' said the chief softly, 'why do you want to put only one kilometre between yourselves and us? Put a million kilometres, in fact leave Kamerun. What could be safer for your health than that?' (73)

If the dispute between the Douala Monarch and the German colonial administration stems from land appropriation based essentially on the Manichean allegory of race, the outcome of German arrogance of superiority complex of race, the discord between the hero of the novel, Martin Paul Samba, and the Germans is motivated by his frustrated love affair with the daughter of his German benefactor, Von Kurt Morgen, a frustration, carefully orchestrated by the latter and one equally based on racial Manicheism, as brought out in a conversation between the hero and his mother.

A brief background to the mother-son tête à tête is necessary. Von Kurt Morgen, like many Germans in Kamerun, has left his wife and daughter back home in Germany and come to make his fortune in the colony. A lonely business man, he has two healthy Kamerunian house servants. He seduces a young and beautiful Kamerunian virgin, Katie, an aunt to young Martin Paul Samba whom he adopts as a son and undertakes to educate after the latter's father has been killed. Bright and young Samba completes his education in the colony and proceeds to Germany under the sponsorship of Von Kurt Morgen. In Germany the beautiful daughter of Morgen, Sonia, falls in love with the dashing military officer that Samba has now become. But her hypocritical and adulterous father who has enjoyed the love and company of Samba's aunt will rather prefer his daughter to die than to marry a black African!

One day he called his mother and said to her, Mama, I have been a fool all my life. Sonia's death was a great blow to me. I don't know if I shall ever get over it. But over and above that, there is something else which has filled me with bitter pain;

'What is that, my son?'

'Has it ever occurred to you to ask why Von Morgen preferred his daughter to die rather than have her marry me?'

'He could not have known that she would take her own life, Martin-Paul.'

'Oh yes he did, Mama. I have never told you but Sonia was a fragile person inside and her father knew it. When we first went to Germany, it was I who saved her from disaster and healed a big wound in her that had been inflicted on her by her father. I pulled her back from the abyss. The worst thing Von Morgen could have done was to lock her up in an asylum for insane people. However, what I wanted to tell you is this: I have now realized just how much we meant to Von Morgen. We didn't really mean much to him. He could come here to Africa and live with my Aunt Katie and profess to love not only her but you and I and Papa. He called me his son, but when that love was put to the test, it failed to stand up. Do you understand what I'm telling you mama?'

'I think so my son. Massa Kurt never saw you as someone fit to marry his child.'

'Why, Mama?'

'Because you're a black man, my son. It was presumptuous of us to imagine that Massa Kurt ever saw us as his equals.' (68)

This discovery becomes a crucial watershed in the life of the hero. Henceforth he decides to fight the hypocritical Germans; he turns away from being a tool in their service to being a thorn in their flesh. Until now the German imperial masters had turned Martin Paul Samba, like an obedient dog, against his own compatriots; henceforth, however, Martin Paul Samba, like a mad dog, will turn against his masters. The falcon will no longer hear the falconer simply because things have fallen apart, and the world of the hero is out of joint.

It has taken me a whole life time to realize them. Meanwhile I have turned my own people against me. I have made myself the white man's tool. I want to change that, Mama. I want the white man out of Kamerun. I want to wipe that smile of superiority from their hypocritical faces. ... I want to re-instate myself in the eyes of my countrymen as a true Kamerunian. From now on I shall be working against the Germans (69).

Determined as he is to fight against the Germans, Martin Paul Samba, now chief of Ebolowa, will find ready and willing allies in the Douala chiefs led by Rudolph Manga Bell, themselves with a big land grudge against the colonialists. These local rulers with control over their citizens will collaborate with other chieftains to widen the narrative of anti-colonial nationalism, constituting a major threat to German imperialism.

For all their German education Martin Paul Samba and Rudolph Douala Manga Bell are regarded as racial inferiors by the German, as the inferior Other. Another Kamerunian intellectual equally educated in Germany but now in the colony a victim of German racist attitudes among his German professional colleagues, is Felix Bele, a medical doctor and the first Kamerunian husband of Zara the heroine of the text. Thus frustrated, Felix Bele wants to go to the U.S. to specialize as a pharmacist, a different medical branch that will take him away from condescending German medical circles and make him independent of negative German intrusions. This comes out of the complaint he makes to his wife in order to justify his leaving her for further studies.

It does mean a lot to me, Zara. Right now I'm very unsatisfied with the work I'm doing at the hospital. With all my big title of Doctor, I'm being used as nothing better than an infirmarian. I'm good only for bandaging wounds and dispensing prescribed medicines. The white doctors won't let me do any consultations (71).

We therefore have German colonialism in Cameroon being seriously questioned; for it has stirred up growing antipathy against the imperialists from various angles. Whether this is from popular traditional rulers like Rudolph Douala Manga Bell of Douala and Martin Paul Samba of Ebolowa, or from a frustrated medical doctor like Felix Bele, or from a wise, philosophical woman like Aunti Ekodi, we find the author, Azanwi Nchami, through these characters, raising important questions about the nature of German colonialism or the behaviour of German colonialists, a comportment that seems to point to one fact only: that the imperialists had at the back of their minds the Hegelian idea that Kamerunians, or Africans, for that matter, were not worthy enough to be considered on equal footing with European colonialists. This inhuman German treatment of colonial subjects generally corroborates what Christian P. Potholm (1979) says of colonial systems in general, that is, that 'all colonial systems share a number of characteristics. All were authoritarian, exploitative, disruptive, undemocratic and fundamentally racist' (117). In the final analysis, therefore, *Footprints of Destiny* must be recognized for what it is: Nchami's scathing interrogation of the ideological structure of German colonialism based on racial Manicheism.

When all has been said and done, a fact remains to be highlighted here, and it is this that *Footprints of Destiny* exudes a greater sense of history than any of the works already treated. Indeed, there is a general sense in which it could be argued that although there are adumbrations of the historical novel in the texts already examined above, or still to be analysed hereafter, because they are products of the socio-historical conditions of the Cameroonian society, *Footprints of Destiny*, unlike these works, is the historical Cameroonian novel par excellence. It is not only that with reference to Cameroon history it actually cites some historical dates; it reconstructs actual historic personages like Martin Paul Samba and Rudolph Douala Manga Bell, respectively chiefs of Ebolowa and Douala; it recreates actual historical events like the expropriation of the land of the Douala chiefs by the German colonial administration, recounts the authentic brutal subjugation of the ethnic groups that resisted German colonial rule, and re-enacts the ruthless suppression of the anti-colonial nationalism, concluding with the arraignment and execution of the key nationalists by the German colonial administration. Throughout her narrative, Nchami consistently uses but the German spelling 'Kamerun' for the English word 'Cameroon'.

At the level of African history the novel reconstructs such historical events as Arab slave raiders from the East African Coast, the Boer Wars in Southern Africa, anti-slave ships patrolling the Gulf of Guinea and

intercepting slave-ships and freeing their slaves, many of whom were settled in Freetown. With regard to European history, the whole background of European power rivalry and competition among colonizing European countries prior to the outbreak of the First World War is well-captured. Therefore, a student of Cameroon, African and European history reading the novel will discover that the author has certainly done a great deal of historical research work in composing the text. Such a student will equally realize, especially with reference to those portions of the work dealing with the colonial history of Cameroon that there is, indeed, a close recounting of history. Here is the concluding paragraph of Nchami's novel, a literal account of the fate of the defeated Germans vis-à-vis the victorious Allies at the end of the First World War: 'The Germans were evacuated from the Protectorate and interned in Spanish Rio Muni. France and Britain divided the country up between themselves. Kamerun became Cameroon for the British and Cameroun for the French. A new colonial era had begun for the former German Protectorate' (111).

To further foreground history and social context in the interpretation of literature in the spirit of new historicism, we will quote here from a non-literary text, a purely historical work published in the 21st century but dealing with the same aspect of Cameroon colonial history as recreated by Nchami. A sensitive reader of *Footprints of Destiny* would think that the passage was from the novel:

In 1911, for example, when the government was expropriating the land of the Douala people to improve health conditions in the white settlement, the chiefs protested against the Germans. By 1914, when the war broke out, the matter had not been resolved. Instead King Bell of Douala was accused of treason in plotting with other chiefs against the Germans. He was found guilty and executed.

In Ebolowa, it was the same story with Martin Paul Samba. The Germans arrested him on 1st August 1914, and charged him and his collaborators with treason. He was tried, condemned to death and executed. Both Rudolf Douala Manga Bell and Martin Paul Samba were traditional rulers who gave their people the political leadership they needed to fight against German rule (Amaazee 21-22).

For all practical purposes, for the new historicist the historical events and German colonialist attitudes have passed away and are more or less lost. But they are now represented only in writing, as text. However, Amaazee's non-literary text can be juxtaposed with Nchami's *Footprints of Destiny* and the textual traces of the German colonial past can still be

sufficiently read from the former with the same attention given to the study of a literary text, to arrive at the discernment of the hegemony of German colonial state power in colonial Cameroon.

Although Azanwi Nchami, in places, recounts history closely, she does not do so blindly. That would undermine her fertile imagination that allows her to impose a certain form, her own kind of rhythm or technique on to the basic historical facts available to her. The specific genre within which she is writing, the historical novel, demands a combination of fiction and history. Any material that is purely history and nothing but history would make the most unreadable of novels. But this is not the case with *Footprints of Destiny* whose author is first and foremost an artist before she is a historian.

Having said this, however, we must submit that there is the tendency, occasionally, for the historical chronicler to take over from the teller-artist. Therefore, in the novel, where we notice that some incidents lack adequate dramatic exploration, we know the historian has dislodged the artist. In places this confers the novelistic material summary treatment; potential scenes and events are simply dismissed in one-sentence paragraphs (18, 27, 28 and 85).

In addition the novelist does not adequately explore the potentials provided by the conflict between Africans and the Europeans. We are told, for example, that Martin Paul Samba is an 'eloquent speaker,' but nowhere are we shown this in action. One would have expected an 'eloquent speaker' who stirs his people against the imperialists to make some powerful, revolutionary speeches, to move storms, as it were. One looks forward, in vain, to some dramatic confrontation between Samba and the German colonial authorities. Indeed, the author's inability to adequately reveal her central character through speech is nowhere better illustrated than in the scene in Douala where Samba, now Chief of Ebolowa, is expected to address the Douala-based nationalists to explain to them the strategy the Cameroonians will adopt against the Germans. After introducing the Ebolowa Chief, Rudolph Manga Bell returns to his seat, and Martin Paul Samba stands up, and that is all! Not a word from him, nothing. The scene simply ends, and the opportunity for some oratorical display is squandered (85).

However, these flaws pale into insignificance when compared with the novel's artistic strengths. *Footprints of Destiny* is a readable book because of the art that informs the novel in general and the strong stamp of individuality that marks Nchami's prose style. The latter has a poise, strength, precision and confidence that shows her mastery of the English language. Hers is a forceful style, sometimes characterized by the use of concrete words, words of power and the graphic images she can conjure: "Your tongue is quick to

spit out venom little viper' (32); 'Her rich ripe body swollen in imminent motherhood sent blood barraging through his veins in tumult' (17); 'A treacherous thought was pounding through his brain' (81); and 'For a moment they faced each other like prize fighting cocks ready to pounce on each other' (87).

The peculiar historical circumstances compelling the constant movement of Nchami's characters, especially Zara the heroine, make it impossible for love relationships between the central characters to be sustained over a long period of time. Yet, in the relationships that she depicts, the author shows real talent in conveying effectively, the stirrings of love and desire in young people, particularly in the romantic rapport between Nguni and Zara, Samba and Sonia, and, above all, Samba and Zara. Similarly, while she may not always reveal her hero dramatically, Nchami does have the rare gift to make memorable physical descriptions like those of Nguni, Zara and Samba.

Another of the novelist's artistic strengths is her skill at occasionally evoking atmosphere such as the idyllic, romantic existence led by Nguni and Zara prior to the fateful arrival of slave-raiders, on the one hand, and the seductive, paradisaical origin of the mythical Zara, on the other. Equally impressive is the dramatic delivery scene in which Paul Samba, acting the midwife, delivers Zara of her baby, with all the gratitude and romantic reinforcement implicit in the important event (83-84). No less captivating is that subtle, very subtle, Gothic quality with which she invests her prose when she evokes the near eerie atmosphere in Von Morgen's house where his wife, deformed beyond recognition by a horrible cancer, virtually assumes the aspect of a dreadful monster hiding within the depth and labyrinth of a medieval castle that is all but haunted.

Nchami's female characters are well-done, and their behaviour is psychologically defensible. Elderly women like Auntie Ekodi (Samba's mother) and Ma Bele display a more realistic maturity of insight into matters of love than do younger women like Zara and Charlotte Amelia. Similarly, given the age of the latter group their infatuation or youthful passion is equally psychologically realistic (89-97).

Even though we have acknowledged that the author has not successfully revealed her hero through speech, she has nevertheless handled characterization in general fairly successfully. In contrast to her manner of handling Martin Paul Samba, the author has depicted Rudolph Manga Bell more successfully in the sense that he is more memorable through not only his actions but, above all, through his words or utterances vis-à-vis the colonialists at key moments in the text.

First, Rudolph as a young man and a student in Germany is a kind of romantic figure. A rich student with the means to sow his wild oats before settling down, he is flashy and flamboyant in his dressing and extremely extravagant. But back home as a mature ruler of his people, he is an articulate politician, able to stand his ground before a hypocritical colonial administrator. The kind of discourse he employs against the Germans is the type of rhetoric one would have expected ‘an eloquent speaker’ like the hero, Martin Paul to use. In this regard, then, Rudolph is a more convincing character.

Azanwi Nchami is the first female Anglophone Cameroonian novelist who has made quite an impression with her first and only novel to date. Twenty-two years have rolled by since she wrote that book. It is high time she came out with another.

Notes

1. Kenjo Jumbam. *The White Man of God*. London: Heinemann, 1980. Page references to this book are taken from this edition.
2. Joseph A. Ngongwikuo. *Taboo Love*. 2nd Edition. Yaoundé: Editions SOPECAM, 1991. Page references to this text are taken from this edition.
3. Azanwi Nchami. *Footprints of Destiny*. n.p.: ALFRESCO, 1985. Page references to this novel are taken from this edition.

Chapter Four

Anti-Heroes and Societal Crooks

Unlike the three novelists in the previous chapter who are concerned with the theme of cultural conflict between the Cameroonian way of life and the European civilization, the imaginative writers examined in this chapter (L.T.Asong, Talla Ngarka, and Nsanda Eba) are pre-occupied with the seamy side of society; that is, they artistically x-ray the sordid side of the Cameroonian community. Even though, generally speaking, one can say that most Cameroonian novelists of English expression are concerned with the moral health of their society, those studied in this chapter are particularly interested in anti-heroes, societal crooks, villains, swindlers and men of the underworld who live by their wits. The novelists take a critical, satirical look at the post-independence Cameroonian society, leaving few people unscathed. But the Anglophone Cameroonian fictional writer most fascinated with the theme of anti-heroism and societal crooks is L.T. Asong.

L.T. Asong is the most prolific Cameroonian novelist writing today in English, and his seven published novels, within the last decade of the 20th century, must be seen by literary scholars as an impressive contribution to the development of Anglophone Cameroon literature. But this chapter will be concerned with only six of them, namely *Stranger in His Homeland* (1994), *The Crown of Thorns* (1993a), *A Legend of the Dead* (1991), *No Way to Die* (1993b), *Salvation Colony* (1997) and *The Akroma File* (1996). The order of analysis of the texts reflects a logical sequence of the novels within Asong's fictional corpus. For instance, though published a year earlier than *Stranger in His Homeland*, *The Crown of Thorns* is actually the sequel to the former novel, while *Salvation Colony* is the sequel to *No Way To Die*. This chapter partly defends the thesis that Asong's main characters in the six novels are anti-heroes, carefully conceived, in each case, to make him accomplish special artistic effects and convey a particular authorial vision (Ambanasom 'Introducing Asong' 185).

In the conventional sense the hero of a novel should evince some or all of the following attributes: courage, dignity, decency, honesty and an essentially kind disposition. He should be one, even with a flaw, who inspires respect, admiration and even love from both virtual characters and readers alike. Often when faced with adversity such a protagonist puts up a reasonable fight or resistance. Conversely, the anti-hero is one who lacks all or most of the above qualities. In other words he often possesses but their very opposites.

In the hands of Asong anti-heroism becomes a significant device of technique. And the term ‘technique,’ in literature or art in general, means ‘the working methods or special skills employed by a writer or artist in producing a work of art....how something was done’ (Holman 441). Drawing on T.S. Eliot’s insight, Katherine Lever says “technique” is ‘any selection, structure, or distortion, any form or rhythm imposed upon the world of action’ which enhances and enriches our understanding of such a world. In this regard, she goes on, ‘everything is technique which is not the lump of experience itself’ (Lever 88).

Thus, technically speaking, choosing to construct his novels around anti-heroes is a deliberate rather than an arbitrary artistic decision on the part of the novelist. For, it involves, with reference to his central male subjects, a careful selection, construction or distortion of the characters, meticulously building them up and then cutting some of them down to size, debunking, demystifying them in accordance with his aesthetic goal or authorial vision. Therefore, character, in this case, the anti-hero, is a device of technique just as any of the following devices of technique: contrast, leitmotif, irony, symbolism, digression, or narrative perspective, etc.

In *Stranger in His Homeland* (1994)¹ Asong has conceived an anti-hero, Antony Nkoaleck, who, despite his high level of academic attainment, (he holds an MSc. in political science) is very ignorant of the norms of his society. The result is that, for all his good intentions, he behaves like a fish out of water because he is a stranger to the ways of his society. His individual norms stand opposed to those of his society, a fact that gives rise to some interesting ironies of situation and disastrous anti-climaxes exposing him to ridicule and humiliation.

After five years of study abroad, Antony Nkoaleck comes home full of honesty, enthusiasm and idealism to change his society. His proud uncle, Anuse, toils and moils to ensure that Antony is the cynosure of attention, who is given royal treatment. To this end he reserves one of his rooms for the graduate. There he will sit in a throne-like chair to receive visitors who will be formally introduced to him through an interpreter. He will not speak in the local vernacular nor will he eat local food.

However, Antony lets down the uncle; for he is found eating a local dish *abe-nchi* with riff-raffs, a group of dirty, naked children with running noses. Besides, Antony does not care about the special treatment Anuse wants to give him. He feels people can see him anywhere. ‘Let them see me anywhere they want. If it does not bother them, it should not bother me’ (52). Anuse decides not to bother himself to give his nephew any more red-carpet treatment.

However, the desire to parade the graduate's abilities remains strong. In Chapter Eleven the entire Biongong tribe plans a grand reception in honour of Antony. All the guests and VIPs are seated, and food and drinks served. Then comes the moment when the tribesmen expect to hear some good words from their illustrious son, their black white man, words that will be expected to echo throughout the town, thanks to the magic of the microphone, and uttered in the awe-inspiring white man's language concerning this great son's fabulous experiences in the land of the white man. Yes, the Biongong have a chance to show off, to guests from other tribes, that they too have a son who has been abroad, one greater than theirs who have spent only a few weeks in Nigeria, a neighbouring country.

However, the great irony of situation is that when he starts addressing the people, Antony does everything the wrong way. First he avoids using the microphone. He starts off in English quite all right, but soon slips into a jarring language, neither English nor the vernacular, but a combination of both, which to him, is the local language! He is advised to stick to English, but then what he says is not what his people want to hear. Indeed, they are ashamed of his frank declarations. Each statement he makes is a gaffe. And Antony glides from one blunder to another, hardly aware of the prejudicial effect of his verbal indiscretion on his listeners:

I am not a white man, for all I know. I do not speak through the nose and do not even feel the need to do such a ridiculous thing ... I am from Cape Coast and Legon in Ghana. Ghana is a black man's country. It is in Africa. The people there are even blacker than you and I ... I am staying in my aunt's house. A mat house. And I was using a wooden comb, something we had long stopped using in this country which you think is backward. Please I hope I have made myself quite clear. You make me feel so guilty and ashamed to think that I have ceased to be one of you. That I have suddenly become a God, just because I have gone to a University outside the country (92-4).

The embarrassment Antony causes the Biongong echoes that of Obi Okonkwo to the Umuofia Progressive Union (UPU) in Chinua Achebe's novel, *No Longer at Ease* (1982 [1960]). When Obi comes back from studies in Britain, his Ibo cultural group wants to show him off to other ethnic groups as a learned and well-dressed man. However, the modest Obi disappoints his kinsmen when he wears but a common man's clothes and speaks but simple English. In their eyes the graduate has committed serious mistakes (29). These intertextual echoes testify to the inherent hybridity and unease of the Western-educated African/Cameroonian within his own cultural milieu.

Antony has certain principles by which he lives, a set of ideas through which he comprehends and interprets reality. He says to his friend Dr. Mandieg, 'A man should have a guiding principle. Some philosophy of life. A formula for living, doctor' (226). A page earlier he had said, 'I have a principle, never to deceive myself or anybody else'. There would be nothing wrong in Antony holding onto these principles were his society ready for them. But where the beautiful ones are not yet born, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the likes of Antony to make moral inroads in such a society. One tends to agree with Dr. Mandieg that in 'human society principles should be constantly readjusted ... to guide you live happily' (226). No man is an island; Antony must mix with other human beings; his fortunes and destiny are inevitably linked to those of other human beings.

In other words, it is one thing to fashion out a neat code of conduct, but quite another to have it work in a society of complex human beings. When Antony the 'been-to' tries to address his tribesmen in an honest fashion when they want to project him as a demi-god, he runs into trouble with them. His so-called truth or frankness does not square with truth or frankness as the Biongong understand it.

Antony scoffs at Eru's life of sex and alcohol. But when he becomes frustrated, he himself violates his own code of conduct and takes to drinking and womanizing, doing exactly what he had condemned in Eru. To justify his rejection of Vicky, his first wife, Antony resorts to outright lies and blatant falsehood, jettisoning his own precepts of truth and honesty. When he is dismissed from the civil service, he throws overboard his principles as he tries to falsify his marriage certificate without his wife's consent.

Antony adopts honesty, truth and fairness as a moral code of conduct in an imperfect society. But it is neither necessary nor desirable to insist on being honest at all times. Though the truth will often set one free, it hurts sometimes. And under circumstances when truth would rather hurt, diplomacy or discreet silence would be preferable. But Antony knows none of these subtleties, and insists on being honest, regardless of the circumstances.

We can simply summarize other instances of irony of situation. Antony falls in love with Vicky Godsabi, a very beautiful girl he takes for a virgin. They get married and then go on a honey moon. Intending to impress her with his virility, Antony arms himself with an aphrodisiac, bitter kola, and a little bottle of vaseline to facilitate his disvirgining of the girl.

But the reality turns out to be a dire disappointment; for Antony's first sexual encounter with Vicky is a terrible disaster with negative psychosomatic effects on him. The bitter truth is that Vicky is not a virgin. On the contrary, 'She was an outright harlot' (185).

Back from studies Antony is enthusiastic and ambitious to change his society. When told that he has been designated heir to the throne of Small Monje, he scoffs at the idea. 'I think the issues confronting mankind today call for a role that transcends chieftaincy. Nkoaleck wants to scale mountains; Biongong is presenting him with mole hills. My mission is simple: to change this society, not to rule villages'.

'Before you realize it', Eru said in his usual comic manner 'the society will change you' (67). How ironically true will Eru's statement be by the end of the novel! Antony will practise what he has been preaching against, corruption. He will implore the D. O. to falsify a marriage certificate without the approval of his wife.

When Antony's future of becoming a great man through the civil service is bleak because his dreams vanish one by one, the only way to greatness left to him is the rejected 'Molehill', the coveted throne of small Monje. Being heir to the throne, he considers the crown already his since the catching ceremony is a mere formality. With cocksureness he invites his friend Dr. Mandieg to attend the occasion 'and watch him sail into the throne' (359).

But the reality is devastating, for Antony comes out of the catching ceremony virtually demented, seething with anger and raving wildly against Ngobefuo because a different prince has been caught as the chief. 'But it had been done so swiftly that Antony who kept imagining hands gripping him from behind, did not see how it all happened. He had been left out!' (378).

Antony commits the unpardonable crime of unmasking himself in public, a terrible sacrilege in the eyes of the tribe, and then, adding injury onto the wound, he affronts the respectable Ngobefuo who has made a pronouncement with regard to his irreverent conduct. Ngobefuo's stern warning only provokes more profanities from Antony's lips (383-4).

What a way of sailing into the throne! What an anti-climax! The last instance of bitter irony of situation comes in the concluding pages of the novel. With the crown gone, Antony has lost nearly everything that can confer a semblance of respectability on him. His greatest comfort now is his wife, Mercy, the only person who means the whole world to him. But ironically it is when Antony most needs Mercy's support that his treachery to her is dramatically revealed by the embittered D. O. who has set fire on Antony's manuscripts.

'What have I done to deserve all this sir?' The D.O. stopped, turned with impudent dignity and then said sarcastically: 'Nothing, Mr. Antony. You are being persecuted for nothing...' then, like a cobra spitting out venom, he said between clenched teeth: 'That the District Officer should co-operate with you to falsify a legal document, a

duly signed marriage certificate. To change it from Monogamy, to Polygamy without the consent of your wife! And knowing that last month in Likume you insulted the law of this state by tearing another marriage certificate into bits. And you have mistreated and finally abandoned a girl who was still your wife by law! You want to make senior government officials titles of books in America because we are rotten and you are pure. You still want to know what you have done to deserve all this? (388)

These instances of irony of situation, stretching as they do from the early part of the novel through the middle section to the concluding pages, and involving Antony Nkoaleck, are not gratuitous. They are carefully conceived and well-articulated, and reveal Asong's conscious but subtle art as well as his attitude towards his central character. Some of them are a fair indication, in our opinion, of L.T. Asong's intention to deflate this self-righteous and opinionated graduate. Cumulatively looked at, most of these ironic situations emphasise the fact that Antony is an outsider to the ways of his society, a stranger in his homeland.

These and many more instances reveal Antony as one who hardly inspires much admiration or respect from his own people nor from the readers. This is a man who boasts that he wants to change his society but who ends up being changed, instead, by that society, a man who upholds truth as a principle but who ends up violating it, a character who stands for honesty but who ends up being dishonest, etc. Antony, to a great extent, then, is a man of confused values.

In exploring the character of this anti-hero, Asong subjects him to a series of humiliating experiences, some of which are clearly meant to debunk his ideas. In this regard Asong is saying that to be able to make a significant impact on his society, an individual needs more than just academic knowledge. He should understand that society very well and be part and parcel of it. He should be sensitive to the feelings of the people who surround him on a daily basis. Academic knowledge alone does not really make one educated. With all his academic qualifications, Antony still appears woefully ignorant with regard to the norms of his people and, therefore, lacks the vital, realistic contact that would make him positively functional in his community. His bane is blind idealism.

The anti-hero in *The Crown of Thorns* (1993a)², a sequel to *Stranger in His Homeland*, is Alexander Nchindia, a rebel prince forced to be a ruler against his very instincts, the young man who in the earlier novel is chosen by the king-makers against his wishes and in clear violation of the will of the late Paramount Chief Fuo Ndee. Here is a man who, throughout his life, has

never dreamt that he would one day be considered qualified to rule a people suddenly thrust into prominence to be a traditional ruler, and this in disregard of the rightful heir to the throne, his half-brother, Antony Nkoaleck. The main catalyst behind this action is the District Officer who has intervened forcefully to influence the Council of Elders to shove aside Antony Nkoaleck in favour of Nchindia. One of the Elders, Ngobefuo, in reference to the gravity of the crime they have thus committed, says, 'This is spittle which we have spat above our heads. One day it will fall back to foul our faces. We shall never wash our hands clean' (38). This metaphorical statement will turn out to be a prophetic pronouncement, indeed, and one pointing to a curse that will end up destroying the soul of the tribe. For, to disregard the will of a dying man like the great late Fuo Ndee, the Paramount Chief of Small Monje, who had, before he died, designated Antony Nkoaleck as his successor, is to commit an abomination in strict traditional terms. Thus Ngobefuo foresees their act as a boomerang that will turn back to destroy them.

Alexander Nchindia clearly refuses to be chief. 'His objections are conveyed in several confrontations which he has with the Council of Elders and the flagrant manner in which he continuously flouts the traditions of Small Monje' (Chia and Nama 174). He actually escapes but is caught and forced to wear an uncomfortable crown; no wonder it becomes the crown of thorns. Despite Nchindia's strong antipathy against being made chief, the Council of Elders and the District Officer (D.O.) remain impervious to his protestations. And as if to reward them for forcing a crown onto his head, Nchindia is openly rebellious and psychologically determined to flout the royal code of conduct. He commits royal blunders and gaffes, and does not respect any royal consideration.

We are, therefore, presented with a classic situation of the making of an anti-hero: a chief or traditional ruler who refuses to behave like one, but prefers to be like an ordinary citizen pursuing his common interests and desires. Nchindia's unroyal behaviour is underscored by such acts as wearing jeans and casual clothes on ceremonial occasions, smoking cigarettes rather than using the royal pipe, quarrelling publicly, or coming close to fighting with ordinary citizens, turning a deaf ear to the seasoned advice of the Council of Elders, disregarding royal retinue during his outings, sleeping in hotels frequented by thieves and harlots, suspected of philandering with women of uncertain virtues, rejecting the queen chosen for him, and marrying, instead, an outcast.

All these are very serious crimes, indeed, especially in an area where tradition prescribes strict royal behaviour. Yet, the people of Small Monje are willing to go an extra mile with their wayward chief, in the hope that he

may turn over a new leaf. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The nadir of Nchindia's disrepute is reached when he 'succumbs to the seduction of conformist degeneracy' (Tala 216), and assists the D.O. in stealing and selling to a foreigner *Akeukeuor*, the god of gods, the spiritual symbol and the soul of his own people. And the people's verdict is final: the wages of Nchindia's sins is death! Nchindia, the D.O and their accomplices are rounded up and murdered by the enraged natives. One cannot find a better anti-hero than Nchindia. A ruler driven onto a throne but who, as a consequence, rebels against his subjects in every act he carries out.

Yet, we cannot really blame Nchindia for what he does. Traditionally speaking, his half-brother and not him has been groomed for the throne. He knows that if he accepts the throne while his brother is still alive, he will appear to have usurped what has been somebody else's right. That is why he feels strongly against being coerced to be chief, and psychologically revolts against the approach adopted by the king-makers.

You cannot hustle somebody into a role he loathes and expect him to do well, especially a role that goes with grave responsibility. To the Elders of Small Monje who allowed themselves to be influenced by the dictatorial D.O., Asong the novelist seems to be saying 'Serves you right'. This is what you get for forcing a crown onto the head of a wretch against the wise words of Fuo Ndee. Indeed, Ngobefuo's prophetic 'spittle' has begun falling back to foul the people's faces.

A sequel to *The Crown of Thorns*, *A Legend of the Dead* (1991)³ continues from where the former ends. In the aftermath of human and material destruction in Small Monje, there is an urgent need to resolve the crisis and restore order: to bring the culprits of the homicide to book as well as to fill the vacant throne. In this regard, competing interests emerge. On the one hand, there is Marcus Anuse, a rich prince of Small Monje, now living in Likumbe, who attempts to corrupt his way to the throne through the venal Governor Abraham Isaac; on the other, there are the kingmakers, led by Ngobefuo, who have settled on another and more respectable son of Small Monje, Beckongcho, as their choice for the traditional office. To ensure Anuse's success the governor orders the eventual elimination of the elders of Small Monje, and imprisons Beckongcho.

However, the Minister of Territorial Administration, Aliou Ndam Garga, informed by Beckongcho of the true situation of Small Monje, intervenes, taking the problem into his hands. He appoints Beckongcho as both the Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) and Paramount Chief of Small Monje and Bimobio, two sub-districts and strange bedfellows, already secretly united through a dubious deal by the late D.O., and the late Chief. But what is conceived as an ideal solution to the Small Monje crises, the dual

functions of Beckongcho, only turns out to be his undoing; for it is impossible for Beckongcho, as a true traditional ruler, to co-exist with Beckongcho, the SDO, emblem of an unethical governmental administration. The seeds of Beckongcho's eventual downfall and the cause of his own cruel, untimely death, have thus been sown. The unscrupulous governmental administration overreaches itself when, following Beckongcho's mysterious demise, it decrees the area around his palace unfit for human habitation, therefore making it impossible for the indigenes to mourn their ruler, provoking thus the justified rebellious anger of the internal and external elite of this accursed administrative unit.

A school teacher who throughout his educational career has enjoyed a leadership role, Beckongcho is the only central character in all of Asong's fiction who inspires respect and admiration from both the virtual characters and the readers. From the impeccably clean environment of Beckongcho's home and the orderliness in his house, the reader can infer discipline and order in the man's character. A man of principle, Beckongcho has a list of moral codes that guide his behaviour (58-59).

He has already distinguished himself as a genuine patriotic son of Small Monje. Concrete proof of his concern for his people is that while a head teacher in Ngeung – ale, in Sowa, it is thanks to Beckongcho's vigilance that the discovery of the loss of Akeukeur is known. For all this, however, Beckongcho remains essentially proud and intransigent, qualities evident when he becomes both the SDO and Paramount Chief. At this time also, given his difficult circumstances, Beckongcho who has never been associated with corruption begins to yield to it, to a limited extent, particularly when he bribes to have his ailing and imprisoned uncle, Anuse, released, or when he taxes both Small Monje and Bimobio to pay for the destruction caused by Small Monje alone.

However, if Beckongcho is generally constructed as a respectable character, there are situations wherein he is subjected to indignities in a manner peculiar to Asong; for, technically speaking, from the point of view of overall structural conception, Asong's novels are invariably constructed around a pattern of ironies of situation at the expense of the central protagonists. In such contexts certain incidents turn out disastrously, contrary to normal expectation. This is thus the basic artistic design, form or rhythm, imposed by Asong upon his fictional world that, otherwise, would have been a shapeless chaotic lump of experience.

We begin with the first of these situations, which comes from Chapter 16 when Beckongcho pays a grandiose royal visit to his subjects in Likumbe. Marshalling diabolic sophistry, casuistry and sheer insult (206-212), and coming at the end of a list of speakers for the day, Anuse, the most

prosperous prince of Small Monje, pillories Beckongcho, now petrified, with a bowed head out of shame; he is compelled, by a peculiar set of circumstances, to sit through Anuse's tirade of abuse against him. This calculated insult is partly couched in metaphorical expressions like *To open one's mouth and talk*, and *to let one's ears hear something* (207), which, the omniscient narrator volunteers to explain to the reader, mean that Anuse considers the SDO and Paramount Chief something of an idiot or a fool!

This is in marked, ironic contrast to the pomp and flourish with which Beckongcho arrives at the meeting and the deferential treatment given him (194-195). Thus a meeting that starts on an upbeat note and followed by flattering speeches, unexpectedly ends on one of anti-climax; the great leader revered at the beginning of the meeting is the very leader humiliated at the end of this chapter by Anuse. At the end of Anuse's verbal barb, according to the author, 'There was silence, abrupt, long, dismal. The kind of very heavily charged silence which can be said to follow the blatant exposure of a *villain who has always masqueraded as a saint* (213). (My emphasis)

As far as Chief Beckongcho is concerned, this is the first calamitous instance of irony of situation. Beckongcho's next humiliation is at Anuse's funeral where, for all his great rank and royalty, no modicum of respect is shown him as he struggles to address the alienated mourners unwilling to listen to him. Some even accuse him: 'Murderer, murderer' (297). In an oblique comparison between Anuse and Beckongcho, the latter is even subtly attacked by a choir in the opening line of their song, 'I am married to Jesus, Satan leave me alone' (296). Here, then, Beckongcho forfeits his people's respect because, as an almighty SDO and chief, he cannot be completely exonerated from Anuse's death.

Other instances involving catastrophic irony come close at the end of the text, and the most significant being the handing over ceremony. Chief Beckongcho, the outgoing SDO, is to hand over to the incoming SDO. Splendidly dressed in a manner befitting a paramount chief, Beckongcho arrives at the ceremonial grounds in great fanfare and in a palanquin, carried by four of his subjects. The singing of the national anthem, already in progress, has to be interrupted and resumed only after the chieftain has alighted.

After the brief ceremony, a few speeches follow, concluded by that of the Secretary General who 'went on to say the one thing he should never have said at the particular time and to those particular people' (340), and in these people's view the anticlimactic utterance is a scandalous breach of protocol. In effect, the Secretary General says: 'I want to insist that there is no higher authority on this land on which we are standing now, than the government whose representative is the SDO ... So nobody, I say

nobody, whatever he thinks of himself, should ever arrogate to himself the respect and honour due to the Head of State or his representative' (340). Beckongcho's mortification is total, and his people are in a state of sullen rebellion; there is confusion, which bewilderment is compounded by the misinterpretation of Beckongcho's hasty departure to attend to nature's call. In a disgraced, confused but dramatic fashion, Beckongcho leaves the premises just as he had arrived, in a kind of drama.

The disastrous manner in which that occasion ends will be read by the authorities as a subversive signal from Beckongcho for his people to rise against the government administrative system. And the mysterious death of Beckongcho, whose body is found under a pile of bricks behind his palace, is the direct consequence of the interpretation of the situation by the ruthless administration.

In these and other instances, then, and for all his respectability and dignity as a character, Beckongcho cuts a rather pathetic figure as a traditional ruler. Like any sensitive human being, he is affected by the dishonour: he suffers from his humiliation. But unlike with a Shakespearean Othello or Hamlet, the readers hardly suffer with Beckongcho, a fact that marks the difference between a tragic hero in the Aristotelian sense and what is generally known as a modern (anti-) hero.

It is important to mention here a creative aspect of psychological characterization relating to the depiction of an aborted occasion, encounter or episode used by many novelists but particularly beloved of L.T Asong who has intimately made it his. This consists of the omniscient narrator divulging to the readers a character's thoughts, feelings, emotions and ideas that would have been revealed had such an occasion, encounter or episode not aborted. Typically Asong presents to the readers the character's intended declaration or utterance before or after the occasion that never was. The rhetorical signals of such situations are the omniscient narrator's expressions like: 'He was going to say...; after that he was going to ...

But it was never to be. That speech was never to be made (240, 241). We find this a very creative dimension of character exploration.

A good example from *A Legend of the Dead* comes from the classic incident of irony of situation when Anuse the prosperous bourgeois meets with his employees and fellow Small Monjeans in a meeting summoned by the latter to allow him to retract some of the damaging things he had said to Chief Beckongcho. On that momentous occasion Anuse turns out in his most impressive and expensive outfit, 'dressing to kill' as the popular saying goes. Puffing proudly away at his pipe, Anuse is arrogance and disdain incarnated. He has come prepared to turn the occasion into one during which he will give the people the dressing down of their life; accordingly,

he has crafted a destructive speech, the rudest utterance imaginable (240-241) in which he will destroy them completely.

‘He was going to say: “It was not out of... that I had spoken... to that your so-called chief ... (240). But hardly has he opened his mouth when police officers arrive and arrest him, administering him the beating of his life. At the end the Anuse who, prior to the confrontation was a disdainful lord, has been brutalized and left naked, with swollen parts of his face, and barely recognizable.

Another anti-hero is Dennis Nunqam, the main character in *No Way to Die* (1993b)⁴, a victim of fate and unique circumstances who is misunderstood and later rejected by friends and relatives. Dennis is a man who is living below the poverty line and eking out his livelihood as a small office messenger in a tiny co-operative. He has been crushed by fate and has withdrawn into himself. To friends, relatives and well-wishers he is a baffling psychological case.

Dennis has a weird prophetic sense of insight into his destiny. After a few personal disasters he becomes certain that no matter what he does or what someone else does for him, he is doomed to fail in life. Indeed, so certain is he of his own sense of failure and of the futility of his efforts that Dennis regards himself as a ‘bird of ill-omen’ that ‘would never rise above the level of a vagabond, an ex-convict, a dish-washer’ (222). Whatever he does under pressure from friends he does so as if to say O.K. let me comply just to satisfy you. But know that you’re wasting your time.

Destiny, a power beyond Dennis’s control, seems to be ordering events in his life for the worse; the scales are heavily weighted against his chances of happiness. We should briefly summarise the five instances of fateful coincidences that have stood in the way of Dennis’s aspirations. In each case the victim referred to is Dennis:

- A brilliant secondary school student is confronted with poverty; the latter succeeds in sending him away from school.
- A talented artist is awarded a scholarship to study in the U.S., but close to the time of departure, he learns to his greatest shock that the daughter of the Minister of Information and Culture has gone in his place!
- An ambitious Cameroonian artist is helped by a British citizen into Britain to study art, but at the London Airport he is repatriated and thrown into jail because his passport is not regular.
- A nonchalant artist is persuaded by a well-wisher to study and register to write the General Certificate of Education examination, but his registration is ineffective because his money order has been stolen at the Post Office.

- An even more apathetic artist is comforted by his friend with the hope that he has been more effectively registered for the next examination session, but now all hell breaks loose in his host family as a nerve-racking domestic quarrel reveals ugly family secrets, leading to Dr and Mrs. Essemo washing their dirty linen in public. And all this because of the troubles of the ill-starred anti-hero. Dennis cannot bear the idea of living and knowing that his woes have ruined Dr. Essemo's marriage. This thought, together with Dennis's self-persecution and death instinct, ends up making death the only way out for him. He attempts to commit suicide but fails.

In isolation these are credible coincidences. But when imaginatively strung together, perhaps not in quick but gradual succession as they really appear in the novel, they produce a distinct pattern; they convey the unmistakable impression of a view of life essentially pessimistic, an outlook of the world that appears to hold that human life is controlled by a non-beneficent Providence, that man is sometimes ruled by a power that does not always care about the welfare of his creatures, a Providence who mostly gives them, instead of joy and happiness, suffering and sorrow.

In our opinion this is the thesis that the novel seems to be designed to illustrate, making it a classic *roman à thèse*. The thesis is reinforced by Dennis's own declaration towards the end of the novel when he says 'And I Dennis Nunqam Ndendemajem, I had been sent to show man his other side, his back side, the side of shame from which everything human ought to shrink' (*Ibid*).

To the extent that this is true, we find it hard to agree with Sam Nuvala Fonkem (1993) who, in his review of *No Way To Die*, holds that there is, on the part of the novelist, an implied "disapproval of nihilistic individualism" (18). Of course, it is morally good for an author to condemn the urge in an individual to kill himself. But we do not think the emphasis in *No Way To Die* is on this implied condemnation.

Fonkem would have been right if the statement had been made by L.T. Asong the author; it would then have been an authorial disapproval. But it is a statement made by Max, a character in the book. Well, some would say that Max could be Asong's mouthpiece, that he could be expressing an opinion of which Asong approves.

This is a possibility. In any case, we are not given much help in this direction by the narrative technique adopted by the author. This enhanced technique of interior monologue gives full responsibility to the characters through whose consciousness we witness the unfolding of the story; the characters each tell their own stories with total authorial detachment. Our stand is therefore clear: the emphasis is less on implied condemnation of suicide than on the inevitability of suicide consequent on the implacability of fate.

Some readers may feel that there is a fundamental implausibility in Dennis's story in the sense that, like Thomas Hardy's Tess, Henchard or Jude the Obscure, he is created to wholly suffer, that the world is too heavily weighed against him. But readers who may be inclined to think so just need to turn and look around them closely to see whether there are no people they know in life who, for no apparent fault of theirs, are implacably dogged by one visitation or the other; people who seem to have been born accursed, to inherit suffering, frustration and sorrow.

The strong presence of fate in *No Way to Die* suggests that Nunqam cannot really be held responsible for what has befallen him, a fact that ought to guide our attitude towards this anti-hero. We have arrived at this conclusion not just through a sympathetic rationalisation but through the evidence analysed above, not just through the after-reading-act of reflection but through the examination of the cumulative force of the sequence of instances of destiny.

When we meet Dennis at the beginning of the novel, he is already a frustrated man, barely scraping a living to sustain his family. The frustration has come about as a result of the first three fateful coincidences above. Indeed, after the third coincidence, Dennis said 'That was what wiped laughter from my face and from my life' (49). It is thanks to the technique of flashback that we come to learn about Dennis's past. His wife Manda says of him 'I had married a man who was too poor to maintain a constant supply of soap to wash his children's clothes, a man who was too poor to buy Dunlop mattress; a man who could not afford zinc for the roof of his house or cement blocks for the walls' (15.)

It is at this point in the novel that a former schoolmate of Dennis's, Max, now Dr. Max Essemu, a prosperous medical doctor, comes in as if sent by God to rescue Dennis. He offers to give Dennis a good education to the highest level possible at his own expense, and to keep Dennis's family on a regular financial allowance. It is his intention to completely transform Dennis from 'nothing to something', an expression that produces but a shock effect on Dennis who feels that miserable as he is, he is still a man, all the same, that he is not 'nothing'.

Dennis thus feels hurt by Dr. Essemu's arrogance and presumption. He asks his wife, 'Manda Am I nothing, Am I not married with two children, boys who will continue to live after we have died? Do we not eat three times a day?... If people tell you that I am nothing, tell them that I am something... If they want to make NOTHING INTO SOMETHING tell them that they want to make SOMETHING into nothing' (14).

Dennis's relatives cannot understand why he does not receive such a generous offer with open arms. They think that by being critical of Dr. Essemo's generosity, Dennis is exhibiting an eccentric behaviour. His friends and relatives work behind his back and arrange with the kind doctor to transfer him from Mbongo to Menako the capital city where he will be educated. But there is a curious irony in the sense that while the family, friends and well-wishers of Dennis are labouring to turn him from 'nothing' to 'something', the man has made up his mind not to change into anything.

Dennis, has therefore, rebelled against his rich friend because he has not accepted him for what he is, or has not come to discuss with him like a close friend to know what he (Dennis) would like to do in life. The following are Dennis's reasons for not co-operating with the man who came to help him. The reasons are found in *Salvation Colony* (1997), the sequel to *No Way To Die*:

If Dr. Essemo really wanted to help me he should have looked for an opportunity to talk to me personally, to ask me what I can really do and how he could help me realize that goal within my own limits. This he did not do. He announced it to my entire family that he wanted to make me a doctor. And just because I had nothing, nobody thought I was worth listening to. They held meetings behind my back, arranged with my wife and my in-laws to ship me to Menako ... (90). My friend did not think that a poor man could think for himself. He believed that the rich man could think and act for the poor man. I don't know how to put it, but his goodness killed me. I became a prisoner of his generosity. It made me meaningless in front of every single human being. I saw no future for myself (117).

The great moral emerging from Dennis's justification of his 'strange' behaviour is that a man should never be underestimated; every sane human being has an ego to defend. Because he has been reduced to 'nothing', Dennis is psychologically determined to frustrate all the well-meaning plans and projects aimed at making him 'something'. Therefore, he does not co-operate with the expensive tutors hired to teach him, but daydreams away his time or engages in 'meaningless' drawings when he should be reading his books. We are, therefore, not surprised that he makes no progress at all in his studies in Menako.

Dr Essemo's wife, Gertrude, wages a psychological war against what she considers a parasitic nuisance brought in to enjoy her husband's wealth when her own relatives are not even allowed to stay with them. She cannot understand how a married man with children can be made to depend entirely

on another. Largely because of Dennis Dr. Essemo's marriage is destroyed, a fact which so upsets Dennis that he does not find life worth living anymore. A main character who, in the face of difficulties, attempts to commit suicide cannot be a hero by our definition. Dennis is a man regarded by his uncle as a curse to the family, by his children as an embarrassment, by his wife as a puzzle, by Gertrude as a pest and a drone, and by his friends and tutors as an enigma. There we have our classic anti-hero, a man who takes no initiative to engage himself in any worthwhile activity outside his passion for art.

Yet, Dennis is not mad but simply a victim of a peculiar set of circumstances that cannot be fully apprehended by his acquaintances. Of his apparent eccentric behaviour he says: 'Sometimes when I sat like this and did things which surprised people, it was not madness. The things which had happened to me had not happened to anybody else' (51).

Dennis Nunqam is a Freudian case in a general sense, and one to be accounted for through scientific determinism. He exhibits all the major symptoms of a person suffering from severe neurosis. That is, he suffers from emotional disorders that prevent him from leading a happy and satisfying life. Though he manages to live from day to day, Dennis is neither at home with himself, nor with relatives, friends or colleagues.

Thus he is a classic case for Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. Yet, not even his learned friend Max, and much less his family, ever dream that in trying to solve Dennis's problems they may be dealing only with the surface symptoms. It does not occur to them to consider taking him to a psychoanalyst who can uncover the real source of the neurosis. Had they done so, they might have discovered that even Dennis's passion for art that has been frustrated and now the apparent cause of his neurosis, can only be a socially acceptable behavioural substitute concealing more socially unacceptable, repressed feelings, desires or demands of his infantile experience, now buried in his unconsciousness. Having said this, however, we must concede that Asong's virtual world probably does not have psychoanalysts. Actually Dr. Essemo had disarmingly admitted: 'I regret not doing psychiatric medicine' (156). When Dr. Essemo thought that wealth alone was all that was necessary in solving Dennis's problem, he made a technical blunder, simply making a bad case worse. True, Dennis was miserable, but prior to Dr. Essemo's mistake, the man in Dennis had not yet died; he died after this miscalculation. This is a psychological novel with philosophical dimensions.

Some readers may have reservations about this novel with regard to the use of the English language by some of the characters:

- a) 'I decided to go *me* away as I had told him' (51). (Manda).
- b) 'I sat *me* quiet' (58). (Manda).
- c) 'Dr. Maximillian replied *back* to my letter' (60). (Dennis).
- d) 'I heard him pull at it for a long *considering* moment' (141). (Dr. Essemo).
- e) 'I found it hard to believe all *what* they had just said' (153). (Dr. Essemo).

Objectively looked at, and from the point of view of Standard British English, each of the quoted sentences contains a grammatical error, indicated by the word in italics; it does not matter that these errors can be explained away, under the rubric of New Englishes, as Cameroonian English. The constructions with the reflexive pronoun 'me' are influenced by pidgin English.

But in the context of Asong's novel whose narrative technique allows for the author's complete aesthetic distance, these apparent grammatical errors define characters; they say something about the educational level of the characters or their linguistic incompetence, and are therefore acceptable within artistic truthfulness. The danger, however, is that if students of the novel are not properly drilled on the contextualised use of these sentences, the learners may assimilate them, fossilising habits they themselves have picked up in the society to the detriment of their language.

To correct the above errors, in (a) and (b) *me* should be deleted; in (c) *back* should be deleted; in (d) *considering* should be 'considerable'; and in (e) *what* should be 'that'.

Our last but one anti-hero who happens to be a villain is Rev Pastor Shrapnell, the main character of *Salvation Colony* (1997)⁵, the sequel to *No Way To Die*. Rev Pastor Shrapnell is the founder of Salvation Colony, the exclusive community of members of a Cameroonian religious sect. It is made up of the scum of the Cameroonian society, the dregs of humanity that society has turned its back on. They include the blind, the lame, the barren, ex-convicts, divorcees, murderers, rapists, saboteurs, arsonists, etc. One of them is the despised and rejected Dennis of the earlier novel. These are people who have irrevocably turned their back on their world of sin.

Rev Shrapnell gives them spiritual fulfilment and a sense of self-worth. He makes them feel that despite their infirmities they are important for being useful and productive. Shrapnell poses as an angel, indeed, a demigod. He is called 'Our Father', with implied divine attributes. A reformed and transformed Dennis says of Pastor Shrapnell that 'Our Father is our saviour. He brings joy to the sad, heals the sick, makes the blind to see, the

deaf to hear, the lame to walk' (97). Actually Shrapnell does not perform any miracles in the way that Christ did in the Bible, unless, of course, one is speaking metaphorically. His brand of miracles may be limited to the rapid numerical growth of his converts and the material prosperity of the colony. Kind, jovial and generous, he is available to his flock at all times.

If this were all about Rev Pastor Shrapnell, he would be an angel in human form indeed. But there is another side to the man, the unpleasant side. This is made evident with the ominous arrival of two nosy journalists, Cosmos and Istromo, bent on looking for a scandal to hang around the neck of the creator of the Colony, Pastor Shrapnell, because, according to them, there are often ugly scandals behind many religious sects.

Eventually their suspicions are confirmed; for Shrapnell does turn out to be scandal itself. The journalists dredge up one scandal after another and publish them in their newspaper, *The Naked Truth*, sensational material eagerly consumed by the outside world. The facts reveal Shrapnell as a rapist, a dismissed medical practitioner, a counterfeiter and a bogus pastor. Posing as a devout spiritual leader, Shrapnell is a hardened criminal and a devil in disguise. His colony is built on counterfeited money secretly produced by him and smuggled into a bank outside the Colony. Confronted with the incontrovertible revelations about him, Shrapnell decides to end the Colony on his own terms. He prepares a poisoned last supper for his closest collaborators and disciples, but is forced to taste of the poison first and die. Dennis Nunqam, who has since become second in command to Shrapnell, takes over control of the Colony, and its spiritual life continues.

Shrapnell has an undue advantage over his visitors in that he obtains useful facts about them before they ever come face to face with him, thanks to a secret tape recorder carried by his gate man. Unknown to the visitors the gate man passes this essential information on to 'Our Father' long before the new comers are interviewed by him. Now, aware of some of their interests and secret desires, Pastor Shrapnell can afford to talk to them as though he were omniscient and omnipotent.

Shrapnell sexually exploits some of the beautiful female converts; for the architectural structure of the Colony is cleverly designed to facilitate the smooth passage of women to and from his office and bedroom unnoticed. Eventually it turns out that Shrapnell has raped Rev Sister Angela O'Reilley under anaesthesia. This incident, which leads to the pregnancy of the Rev Sister, becomes a means for the author to x-ray the basic racist attitude of the Catholic clergy, exposing them as hypocrites. Having been informed that a white Rev Sister has become pregnant, and getting confirmation from the woman herself that it could only have been something like the Immaculate conception since she has known no man,

the authorities of the local Catholic Church summon an all-white priests' conference to discuss the issue in strict confidence, keeping the African priests out of it.

The language of the white priests is loaded with sentiments of racial discrimination within the Catholic Church. Despite the basic brotherhood of all mankind that their faith preaches, the racist priests cannot tolerate a white Jesus Christ being born on profane African soil. This would be a let-down to the superior white race. Consequently, they secretly work out a plan that would spirit the pregnant Sister away to Ireland where Christ will be born on holy white soil.

So important is this racial issue that one of the priests who expresses initial reservation about the decision to evacuate Rev Sister O'Reilly, is mysteriously murdered and hurriedly buried. From the way the death of the priest is handled the murder could only have been ordered from high Catholic quarters, thus a conscious planning and execution of evil. Here is N. Patrick Tata's remark with regard to what Asong the novelist has done to the Catholic church:

Whatever his grievances with the churches, one notices that he treats with loose levity delicate doctrinal or theological issues like racism and celibacy among the clergy, the second coming of Christ, and the behaviour of the Catholic hierarchy in a work fraught with important lessons for humanity. Yet, these are problems of the coil rather than the core of the book which can be defended on literary and artistic grounds. (*The Wink and the Frown* 37)^a

When confronted with incontrovertible facts about his criminality, Shrapnell reveals himself as the devil incarnate. He decides to end the colony and his life on his own terms: "The bile of seven pythons which had been killed during construction work had been handed over to him for burial because it was said it was deadly poisonous. That was going to be his press conference. He would have one last drink with his disciples and the world will remember his last supper!"(168).

Thus we find the themes of appearance and reality, and the willing contemplation and execution of evil well-illustrated in Pastor Shrapnell. Many members of the Colony have been criminals themselves in one way or the other. At least all have been sinners. On the surface Shrapnell looks like an angel, but in reality he is a devil. Indeed, as William Shakespeare says in *Hamlet*, a man may smile and smile, and yet be a villain (I.v.106). That is exactly what Pastor Shrapnell has been: a villain with a deceptive smile on his lips.

His angelic side has so captured the hearts of his devotees that he is literally their god. In fact they hold him in such high esteem that when Shrapnell's diabolical side is gradually revealed, his worshippers stoutly reject the accusations levelled against him. It takes a long time for the overwhelming evidence to make an impact on them, and even then they do not reject him outright.

They are bent, instead, on continuing his work even after his death. They believe that for all his criminal deeds Shrapnell has led them to God; that he has prepared them for spiritual salvation. They vow to spend the rest of their lives in the Colony under the leadership of Dennis. Dennis's fanaticism is so strong that he is able to withstand the powerful arguments put forth by the journalists to get him out of the Colony.

The narrative structure of *Salvation Colony* reveals L.T. Asong's use of the interior monologue, a device of technique first employed in *No Way to Die*. The novel's chapters are headed by narrators telling the story, with appropriate informality, from their own perspectives as though they were speaking their thoughts aloud. In the context of *Salvation Colony*, the result is immediacy, casualness and freshness, producing rapid prose different from a leisurely and discursive narrative guided by the omniscient narrator.

Without assuming the role of the omniscient narrator, each narrator relates only what he or she has seen, heard or experienced, and, where necessary, making characters come alive on the page. Such vivid scenes include, for instance, the lively soul-to-soul encounters and Shrapnell's powerful sermons and pronouncements. It is instructive to note, in this regard, that Shrapnell is himself not a storyteller, but he comes out unforgettably alive from Dennis's narration. Effective as it is, this technique of narration is marred on page 168 where there is ambiguity relating to point of view:

Our father, no doubt followed the announcement. During the two hours that he had to wait to receive his twelve disciples he had made up his mind. If the press has brought pressure to bear on the public to harass his innocent followers, he would teach the world a lesson. He was not going back to America in shame. If salvation colony was going to end it must be he himself to end it, whenever he wants. He would unmake what he has made, period.

The bile of seven pythons which had been killed during construction work had been handed over to him for burial because it was said it was deadly poisonous. That was going to be his press conference. He would have one last drink with his disciples and the world will remember his last supper!

So, whose consciousness and thoughts are revealed in this passage, the author's or Dennis's? The obvious answer is that since the passage comes directly under the chapter narrated by Dennis (his name is at the top of the chapter) they are Dennis's. But if so this is very odd because neither in the previous novel nor in this one does the author, in his use of the interior monologue, attribute the role of the omniscient narrator to the story tellers he has created to narrate the story of the novel. Therefore, Dennis could not possibly have known what was in Shrapnell's mind. The omniscient narrator has little or no place in this novel.

Similarly, the thoughts could not have been those of Asong either. In this and in the other novel it is clear from the technique of narration that L.T. Asong, like Alobwed'Epie in *The Death Certificate*, intends to maintain an aesthetic distance through a complete authorial detachment. So, why this slight inconsistency here? Is it L.T. Asong who nods or the critic who dreams, as Alexander Pope would have wondered?

We think that this question would not have arisen had the author made Shrapnell a narrator at this point in the novel. The thoughts would have been more effectively expressed if they had proceeded directly from Shrapnell himself. Indeed, it may well appear strange to many readers that a character as central, influential and important as Shrapnell is not made a narrator in any chapter; it is an oversight that the author does not take us into Shrapnell's thoughts as he so successfully does with some of the other characters, notably Dennis.

The main cause of the downfall of Rev Pastor Shrapnell is *The Naked Truth*, a newspaper founded by two journalists, Istromo Ngiawa and Cosmas Mfetebeunu. Thanks to the technique of investigative journalism these two will carry out a research, delving into Shrapnell's unpleasant past and dredging up damaging evidence that they publish in their paper. The effectiveness of the deployment of the device of investigative journalism is seen in the way it completely destroys Shrapnell, for the ugly revelation ends up making him take his own life. The journalists' digging into Shrapnell's past is reminiscent of the method of detective fiction of the kind dealing, for instance, with the past of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's evil geniuses like Dr. Roylott and Professor Moriarty, characters as brilliant and criminal as Shrapnell.

In this novel Asong's polyphonic narrative technique encompasses a crew of narrators, investigative journalism, public confessions, sermons from the pulpit, and the epistolary device. This gives the reader a sense of the mixing of communicative styles, a fragmentary postmodernist quality that, nevertheless, enhances the readability of the text, and one that Alobwed'Epie equally exploits substantially in his own novel, *The Death*

Certificate (2004). Consequently, Asong's prose, in places, is compelled to conform to this or that set style.

The characters in *Salvation Colony* can be grouped into individuals and types. Dennis and Shrapnell, who belong to the first category, are fairly complex characters. They grow and undergo change, and, by the end of the novel, are not exactly the same persons we met at the beginning. Dennis, for instance, gets into the Colony as an uninformed new arrival as far as the way of life in the place is concerned. He is initiated into it and turns out to be a productive devotee of Pastor Shrapnell. However, he becomes critical and actually scornful of Pastor Shrapnell when the latter's criminality is only too evident. But for all his abhorrence of 'our Father', Dennis sticks to the Pastor's essential philosophy and not his deeds; he holds on to what Shrapnell preaches and not what he does.

Shrapnell evinces a kind of paternalistic care and concern over his devotees. Kind and generous, he is available to his flock at all time. But beneath the façade of the angelic pose lies a villain, a hardened criminal, ready to kill even his closest collaborators when he deems it necessary, with no qualms of the conscience. And at his most desperate moment this angel reveals his genuine attitude, until now well-concealed, towards the black race which is that of his worshippers. In a typical red-neck fashion he spits this out at them 'A pack of unredeemable monkeys.' (178)

The rest of the characters including Istromo and Cosmos are mostly types. We are shown only a particular dimension of their character. They do not change much since they are consciously conceived to play only a particular role in the novel. But this does not make them any less realistic. Both the complex and the flat characters are thus realistically done.

That is why all the characters behave in a convincing way, revealing thus the artistic truthfulness of Asong's art. The jobless journalists are as aggressive and resourceful as their tribe should be if they must survive on their wit; Shrapnell displays complete mastery of the Bible as any serious pastor should; Dennis's knowledge of the Bible is only second to his mentor's, and his deep faith in Christ is typical of that of one born again; and Manda behaves no more no less than a typical woman of the world.

From the point of view of inventiveness, it was a mark of genius when L.T. Asong struck on the idea of open-air confession during the soul-to-soul sessions; for it does much to enhance the book's claim to fame, in our opinion. It allows for arousing, shocking, dramatic utterances; it reveals the peculiar mental universe of the confessor; it makes for interesting performer-audience exchanges, all of which lively factors improve the book's readability.

The confessors turn out to be criminals of all sorts: murderers, rapists, saboteurs, thieves, adulterers and poisoners. Outrageous as most of the confessions are, they have ultimately a satisfying spiritual and psychological effect on the confessors; for, when a confessor, even in real life, openly and shamelessly disburdens himself of his sins and begs for forgiveness from his victims or their relations, there is a liberating effect on his soul, a sense of freedom from crippling sins and uneasy moments of the conscience.

The soul-to-soul sessions whereby members of the Colony come together equally have a sound psychological backing. Consciously or unconsciously, they are based partly on Carl Rogers' *Encounter Group Experiences* (1970). Participants in an encounter group, like the members of Salvation Colony, most of whom are former criminals and some with physical defects, drop their defences and relate directly, freely and openly to one another. The trust generated helps an individual to recognise, experiment and exchange unfavourable attitudes for those more conducive to constructive behaviour. That is why in Salvation Colony the inhabitants live happily; the infirm can joke about their infirmities, calling one another good-humouredly by funny names according to their infirmity. Their energies are harnessed for worthwhile pursuits, everyone working positively for the spiritual growth of the Colony. The public confessions, with interactions between confessors and the audiences, with interjections from Pastor Shrapnell and other members of the audience, are realistic, believable and true-to-life.

It is appropriate that at a certain point Pastor Shrapnell should interrupt the confessors and ask them how they now feel towards their victims; it is in order that after the correct response from the confessors, Shrapnell should cry out 'alleluia!' and the audience respond 'Praise the Lord'; and it is realistic that at a dramatic point in the confession an excited member of the audience should burst out; 'Soul-to-Soul E-e-i-i-men'.

Given his positive influence over his devotees in having transformed them from near worthless creatures to useful people with a wonderful sense of self-worth and belief in their own possibilities; considering that he has brought happiness to them as well as making them live with their different infirmities without any complexes; and seeing that he has inspired them to live in confident expectation of their spiritual salvation, the converts' blind and absolute loyalty to Rev Pastor Shrapnell is understandable. It does not surprise us that they do not see anything wrong in him when ugly revelations appear in *The Naked Truth* about him.

The social relevance of *Salvation Colony*, in our view, lies in the fact that it gives rise to serious thoughts as to the negative possibilities of the human mind. Nowadays religious sects spring up like mushroom in many countries. Genuine or deviant pastors and priests pull crowds of fervent faithful. In

some cases when it is established beyond reasonable doubt that a wayward pastor or priest is actually violating the central teachings of the standard church, the erring priest will still exercise a strong influence on his believers. Such worshippers are ready to defend their idols, just as members of the Colony do to Pastor Shrapnell. Their attitude is psychologically realistic.

It is against such unconditional loyalty to influential and potentially dangerous priests that Asong's novel seems to be warning us. The horrendous example of Jim Jones is still fresh in the minds of many readers. It was in 1976 when Jim Jones, a charismatic spiritual leader of a sect, led a group of sect members from the U.S. to an isolated place in Guyana (South America) for uninterfered worship. However, the pressure on them from the outside world became intolerable. Blind devotion and uncritical acceptance of whatever he said made it easy for Jim Jones to persuade all his followers that if they willingly drank cyanide and died, they would go to heaven. And they all did and died, parents, children and all, including the spiritual leader himself. Jim Jones' atrocity was the mass suicide of some 820 people.

While we are not prophets of doom, it may not be unreasonable to say that we may not have seen the last of the Jim Jones of this world. But the destructive potential of a sect may not necessarily lie in the elimination of human lives. For, like Shrapnell's salvation Colony, it is partly a front to allow Shrapnell to keep up with his old-time profitable practice of counterfeiting to sustain his luxurious lifestyle.

The fact of Shrapnell's sexual immorality and involvement in counterfeiting underscores this thought, that, in the words of Shrapnell himself, 'Good and evil are two sides of the same coin.' (173) It shows that for all Shrapnell's claim to godhead, since he seems to glory in his own deification by his devotees, he is only a human being, after all. Indeed, any man born of man and woman, with the exception of Christ of the Immaculate Conception, is already born in sin, and prone to sin. Any saintly pretensions on the part of such a man are only within the limit of human capacity. Shrapnell can be deified by his worshippers, but he himself knows only too well that though he is a giant in their eyes, his feet are made of clay; that, like many men, he can be brought down to earth by his sensual desires, particularly the desire for women and wine.

In Cameroon there are unimpeachable facts relating to some deviant priests with hypnotic powers over their loyalists; priests who have made confessions or other declarations, leaving the public to conclude that they (the erring priests) had been professing Christ in the open, while in the dark, they had been paying allegiance to spiritism or mediumistic powers. In this regard Asong's novel seems to have been written to warn us to be careful, or to look before we leap; for not all that glitters is gold. The power

of the sect over the individual can be too strong. Dennis's example is only too clear. Cosmos who sets out to re-educate and de-indoctrinate Dennis out of the Colony is himself almost converted, instead.

Yet, it would be a simplistic reading of *Salvation Colony* if one were to conclude that because of their potentially nefarious side L.T. Asong has carried out a blanket vilification of all sects, a short-sighted view, indeed, and one that fails to recognize the moral basis for the existence of many sects. Some sects are built on a moral foundation and do deliver the spiritual goods to their adherents: joy, happiness, and the hope of spiritual salvation. Some, like Shrapnell's Salvation Colony, may be conceived from a criminal motivation, known only to the founder(s), with the gullible devotees ignorant of the evil foundation. What L.T. Asong seems to be saying is that an evil, or a hypocritical, founder of a sect may yet have a positive spiritual effect on his adherents if the latter do not really know from the beginning that their leader is such.

Until about the end of the novel, this is exactly how Shrapnell's worshippers regard him: as a wonderful, fatherly Pastor who has led them to God. The eventual discovery of his basic evil motives does not alter their spiritual conviction: that they are closer to God and spiritual salvation, thanks to Shrapnell. In this context the author would seem to be saying that even the devil can lead people to God, that spiritual salvation can even be made possible by Satan in spite of himself.

There is a great deal of truth in this thought. Even in traditional churches, with their fixed central teachings, their priests and pastors would not say that they are perfect beings. Indeed, none has been, since the fall of Adam. If they are the humble servants of God that they should be, many priests and pastors would testify, like Chaucer's Pardoner, that they are sinners, and, at times, hypocrites too, that they sometimes preach one thing and do another. Because of their own inherent weaknesses, some of these servants of God believe that while some of their Christians may see God, not all pastors and priests may necessarily be saved. Thus Christians may be led to God by sinful criminal servants of God: Priests and Pastors. This is an important thesis that emerges from Asong's work and one that has great meaning to us many of whom belong to one church or the other.

Reading Asong's novel also gives us a sense of the power of information and the crucial role that responsible journalism can play in a society with a free press. The role of the traditional press is, we are told, to inform, educate and entertain. It is thanks to the investigative efforts of Cosmos and Istromo that the society becomes aware of the criminal acts of the bogus Pastor.

A related conclusion has to do with the potential danger that a brilliant and well-educated criminal like Rev Pastor Shrapnell poses to civil society.

This same thought runs through Asong's other novel, *The Akroma File*, whose central character, Akroma, equally bright and well-educated, is a Ghanaian evil genius, who beats nearly the whole Cameroonian police force, as he goes from one felony to another to protect himself and his ill-gotten fortune.

A deep reflection upon this novel will leave the thoughtful student of literature with the impression that *Salvation Colony* is a thesis novel. As defined by C. Hugh Holman (443-444), a thesis novel is one 'that deals with some social, economic, political, or religious problem in such a way that it suggests a THESIS, usually in the form of a solution to the problem... The French term *roman à thèse* is sometimes used instead of thesis novel'. *Salvation Colony* as a thesis novel, is one written on a religious problem: the danger of sect fanaticism. Therefore, people should be sceptical of any sect leader claiming godhead and the ability to lead them to spiritual salvation. The thesis put forward is that religious sects pose a grave danger to society; for, a brilliant criminal like Rev Pastor Shrapnell, the anti-hero of the book, can assume the innocent mien of a religious leader to commit an atrocity in society. Pastor Shrapnell is virtually deified by his devotees who completely surrender themselves to his control.

Shrapnell's otherwise laudable achievement is marred by the fact that he is an evil genius, a fugitive from justice masquerading as a pastor. His Salvation Colony is built on the fruits of crime, on the type of foundation that gives rise to an evil empire, one built on sleazy slippery sand and not on a solid, moral rock. Villainy is Shrapnell's bane.

Asong seems to be saying that when a brilliant, educated man happens to go criminal the society trembles; or that a single, brilliant, criminal mind, if he so wishes, can set a country ablaze. A man like Pastor Shrapnell can do just that if he wants to. Society should beware of intelligent crooks; they are a potentially dangerous breed. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes, had expressed a similar sentiment concerning Dr. Roylott by saying, 'When a doctor does go wrong, he is the first of criminals. He has the nerve and he has knowledge' (209).

But if *The Naked Truth* plays a positive role in exposing the criminal methods of a potentially dangerous element, it equally reveals itself as a dangerous weapon in the hands of potentially destructive elements. We notice that before the nosy journalists land on any incriminating material on Shrapnell, they have been concocting clever, malicious facts and half-truths against the man, false information intended to ruin him.

Granted, Shrapnell happens to be a wicked man who is cruelly exposed. However, the potential for these hungry journalists to use their vicious paper to bring down an innocent figure is there. These unprincipled

journalistic methods should warn us against this that not all that is printed in newspapers is the whole truth; that we ought to read newspapers sometimes between the lines, taking into account the background, ideological slant, and motivation of the owners of such publications.

One of L.T. Asong's solid personal achievements on which his reputation will rest is the novel entitled *The Akroma File* (1996)⁶, a rare fictional exploration of criminology with frightening implications and a high social significance. Faced with debts at home and threatened by poverty, a brilliant and well-educated Ghanaian, Akroma, the text's anti-hero, using unorthodox means, successfully gets into Cameroon where he is bent on making a fortune.

Akroma arrives in Cameroon virtually penniless but draws on his tremendous presence of mind to build up a formidable fortune, enough to wipe away all his debts back home in Ghana and still leave him a millionaire. This he does essentially by swindling a desperate landowner, Pa Sabbas, and by milking a wealthy but illiterate school proprietor, Anguissa – Anguissa Bertin.

How this illegal alien eludes the police or bribes his way through them is a mark of L.T. Asong's genius in character conception and a telling comment on the Cameroonian legal and security system, one that, according to the text, thrives on venality. Having landed in Cameroon, it does not take long for Akroma to discover that in Cameroon money can buy just about anything; accordingly, he sets his criminal mind to work and, within a short time, uses money to procure for himself two Cameroonian I.D. cards.

One bears Njonjo Fabian Mula, born in Tiko in the South-West Province, and the other Bidias Polycarp Abessolo, excluding his genuine Ghanaian passport. In addition, depending on the situation, Akroma assumes other aliases. Thus to his Cameroonian girl friend he is Kojo Thompson Abreba, an oil merchant from Liberia; to Pa Sabbas, a land owner and a once prosperous business man but now in financial straits, he is Kojo Hanson, a Liberian investor travelling incognito to avoid taxes.

Therefore, with money Akroma buys for himself two Cameroonian I.D. cards, bribes his way through police checkpoints, and wins over a doctor to issue a false medical report when he murders a man in a hotel. With money Akroma transforms Cours du Soir Anguissa-Anguissa into a complete Grammar school, buys over completely the immoral, criminal and unconscionable Divisional Boss of National Security, and gets himself into the good books of people who matter within his immediate environment.

Important as money is, Akroma knows only too well that people are even more so. Hence he makes friends with Cameroonians. He gets for himself partners and accomplices, characters without whose help he cannot make it in the Cameroonian society, characters who help him realize his financial dream. And for this he cultivates kindness and generosity for the service of wickedness, for he finally eliminates all these characters in the supreme interest of his personal security and financial empire.

Thus without any qualms he sets a hotel on fire which engulfs his girl friend, Severina; kills in cold blood his own host, Rev Dieudonne Akwa, in a hotel; strangles to death his old time friend, Jean-Paul Mombangu (J-P); and shoots point blank his closest accomplice and protector, Commissaire Essomba.

But corrupt as the Cameroonian police force is, it is graced by an exceptional police officer, Kum Dangobert, out to track down the fugitive Ghanaian. The final squaring off between the Ghanaian evil genius and the best Cameroonian police superintendent is like the clash of giants that ends in a cataclysm.

In this novel Asong employs a narrative technique he has never used before: that of the journal or diary, the daily record of events, accounts and thoughts, etc. But the journal is that of the omniscient narrator rather than one kept by a character in the novel such as Toundi's, for example, in Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy*. Days, years and, in some instances, historically verifiable events and personages, are recorded. Thus there is an occasional reference to the April 6th coup and its aftermath in Cameroon in 1984, the coming to power of President Jerry Rawlings of Ghana and his revolutionary economic policies, the emergence of Idi Amin of Uganda and his anti-Israel and anti-Christian policies, and the Jones Town massacre of 1979, etc.

To the uninitiated this narrative approach may pose a technical problem. The reader may feel that he is reading a mere historical chronicle and not a novel, that he is dealing with verifiable historical facts and dignitaries rather than a fictional account of substantial length concerned with imagined real people, in which case doubts about the effectiveness of technique will have been raised.

However, on closer examination, this will be discovered not to be so. Asong's psychological exploration of Akroma's character, detailed physical descriptions, dramatic evocation of events, arousing confrontation between characters, and his felicitous style and the compelling readability of the book, all of these features and more – lift *The Akroma File* to the realm of the novel par excellence.

Asong has used a verifiable historical setting only as a pad for launching his fictional work, placing it, therefore, within a social and historical context. Some personages and events with historical authentication are incidental to the bulk of his work whose main characters are imagined real people. As a character, Idi Amin is very minor in the novel, and so is Jerry Rawlings; as an event the Jones Town massacre is incidental in the novel, and so is the April 6th coup in Cameroon.

The real people who matter are Akroma, Jean-Paul Mombangui (J-P), Rev Dieudonne Akwa, Inspector Kum Dangobert, Pa Sabbas, and Commissaire Essomba. They are essential to the novel because they are linked to Akroma's fate and determination to outsmart the police and make his fortune in Cameroon. The only events that count are those set in motion by the psychologies and actions of two groups of character: the intelligent Ghanaian crook and his Cameroonian accomplices versus the admirable Cameroonian police inspector, Kum Dangobert, alias Scotland Yard. All of these are imagined real people, fictional characters true to life and not true to history. For there is a difference between both. Imagined, real people are fictional characters who, from the way they talk, behave, act and react, we can say, yes, under similar circumstances in real life this is how people would behave. And this satisfies the criterion of artistic truthfulness. There is another criterion that Asong's novel also satisfies and that is the criterion of social significance.

Several themes emerge from the novel, some of which include the willing contemplation and execution of evil, wickedness motivated by personal safety and greed; the ruthless exploitation of a system that thrives on venality, the nadir of a social system and the use of human beings as disposable tools in the service of personal ambition, etc. All of these themes embody negative value statements with regard to the Cameroonian social system, pointing, therefore, to the social relevance of *The Akroma File*.

Literature is not produced in a vacuum; it has a social base. That is, it is socially conditioned, a product of the social and historical experience of the people producing it. A realistic novel cannot be about nothing; it must be about something, about human beings doing certain things in certain ways. In other words it must be concerned with an aspect of human life, a dimension of the human condition. Therefore, an examination of a realistic novel like *The Akroma File* must take into account its wider social context if we must arrive at its social relevance.

Some frightening implications would seem to emerge from Asong's novel. Akroma's criminal story shows that human lives and relationships count for little when personal ambition and safety are concerned, and that, ultimately, there is nothing like mutual trust and genuine love because all

that matters is personal interest, a depressing extrapolation, indeed. If such is the case, one may well wonder what type of world we are living in. Or of what use are our love and friendly relationships? The world of the Akromas is one inhabited by dehumanized monsters.

By exposing to the reader's scorn the Cameroonian police system and mercilessly revealing the wicked, criminal methods of Ghanaians or foreigners in Cameroon, L.T. Asong helps to open the eyes of the general public to the type of havoc that can be wrought upon a people and a system no longer morally accountable. Asong helps to expose the limitless possibilities of evil orchestrated by foreigners who do not care a damn about their host country.

Any Cameroonian who reads Asong's novel will no longer look upon a Ghanaian or any alien, for that matter, as an innocent foreigner. For, in the words of Dangobert's uncle, 'beware of a Ghanaian even if he is dead'. Herein lies the social relevance of *The Akroma File* a very filmable novel that deserves to be read by every Cameroonian, particularly the police force, for its eye-opening value and implications.

The conclusive force of the above moral message is, however, tainted by what we consider a structural weakness in Asong's novel: Akroma's survival. It certainly jars on one's sense of poetic justice that this Ghanaian, who has so successfully exploited the Cameroonian system and killed half a dozen Cameroonians, including the only jewel within the Cameroonian police force, Kum Dangobert, should be left alive at the end of the novel. This amounts to the glorification of an evil genius, the celebration of criminality, an authorial vision that is hardly healthy for a developing country like Cameroon.

All things considered, one can conclude, from the point of view of positive contribution to life in their various imaginative societies in general, that Asong's six anti-heroes are, to some extent, non-achievers. They are scorned, despised and even circumscribed by their society, and are not completely free to behave as they would have liked to. With the exception of Dennis these anti-heroes resort to dishonesty at critical moments in their lives; Dennis and Nchindia are considered indolent and lacking in courage and dignity. The subtle authorial perspective emerging from the six novels of anti-heroism is one wherein, in two of the texts (*Stranger in His Homeland* and *Salvation Colony*), the author ascribes the failure of the protagonists to major flaws in the anti-heroes themselves, while in three works (*The Crown of Thorns*, *A Legend of the Dead* and *No way to Die*), he attributes their downfall largely to societal misunderstanding of them. However, as intimated above, the conclusion of *The Akroma File* as a criminal text which leaves the criminal anti-hero alive at the expense of many useful

Cameroonian souls, translates into an authorial vision prejudicial to a Cameroonian society that should be constructed on a solid moral foundation.

Another imaginative product of the modern Cameroonian socio-cultural environment is Talla Ngarka's *The Herbalist* (1988/98)⁷, dealing with societal misdeeds, centred around the activities of a quack doctor, Tamfu, the herbalist. A charlatan who at one point seems to be a jack of all trades, Tamfu finally narrows down to one area of specialization: stomach-related problems, with a clearly defined clientele consisting of college girls and unmarried women. In other words the branch of his expertise is abortion, and here he gets into shady deals with his clients, receiving as fee and reward, cash and sexual gratification. But when pregnant Beri, one of his clients, dies from his prescription, Tamfu becomes a fugitive from justice as he escapes into a neighbouring country.

Tamfu justifies his hanky panky deals on the grounds that other professional colleagues engage in them too. He does not rise morally, head and shoulders, above the other characters. In fact no character in the main story does. They are all of a piece in that they are morally deficient. They include the abettors in Beri's crime, those with an inordinate sexual desire, and the practitioners of quackery. And it is here that Ngarka's vision can be said to be limited. Admittedly, his is a realistic world, but an incomplete one too. This is a novel in which abortion becomes a subject that raises no serious issue; abortion is talked about but not debated. No one seriously questions the morality of the act. And the absence of a dialectical confrontation deprives the novel of the dramatic force inherent in the treatment of such a controversial issue.

True, the novelist delivers some subtle moral lessons through the bitter irony of Elako nearly going to bed with his own daughter, and of Beri following in the depraved footsteps of her mother, to the latter's shock. But one somehow feels that the author could have included a character with a superior moral sense to provide an alternative ethical view point. As this is not the case, the artist betrays a lack of an appropriate moral compass, a reality further underscored by the fact that, at the end of the novel, Tamfu the crook can be let off the hook with impunity.

This writer reviewed the novel when it was published in 1988. Since a new edition came out ten years later (1998), one would normally expect the author to have ironed out any possible errors in the earlier version. We are therefore hardly surprised that the layout of the work in the revised edition is much better, and that gone are the obvious, numerous smudges and omissions of the earlier publication. Some of the material has been transferred to other sections or simply deleted, and there has been a change of a name or two.

But by and large the bulk of the more serious errors remains, particularly those connected with lapses of grammatical nature: mixing of tenses. The story is set in the past and ends in the past. Therefore, a sentence that begins in the past or conditional past and ends in the present tense or in the simple future tense is grammatically unacceptable, especially when made by the third person omniscient narrator. 'Then she looked into the future and imagined what would happen when she *meets* the herbalist' (40/32). 'She had started to behave abnormally and her friends feared that she too *may* pass away' (111/167) (My italics). Therefore, as it stands, even in its revised form, *The Herbalist* still needs serious editorial attention.

With Nsanda Eba's *The Multimillionaire* (1997)⁸ we are still in the world of men of the underworld: con men and racketeers, those who live by their wits and keep alive the flame of the infamous phenomenon known as '4-1-9'. Set in Yaounde, Cameroon's capital city, *The Multimillionaire* is the story of an academically ambitious young man, Divine Fonkeng, duped out of his hard-earned money and that of his parents by crooks led by a Nigerian. The gullible Divine is bamboozled into believing that with just an additional financial contribution, he can be transformed into a millionaire. But the reality is a different thing. A holder of 'A' levels in the sciences, Divine Fonkeng teaches in a private secondary school and saves his money for further studies in Britain. He has written a manuscript of a physics textbook entitled 'Basic Physics for Secondary Schools'. One day he is accosted by a younger person, Karl, a childhood acquaintance of his who raises his hopes by saying that he knows a businessman who can help to publish Fonkeng's text book in Nigeria. This man, who commutes between Nigeria and Cameroon, is called Samson.

Proudly carrying his manuscript and accompanied by Karl, Divine presents himself to Samson in the latter's house. Samson and Divine start discussing the manuscript business while Karl sits nearby uninvolved. But they have hardly gone far with their discussion when a fourth character drops in and draws away Samson's interest in the book deal. He is called Chuks, a Nigerian Samson had transported the day before from Ekok together with his carton of wares. Chuks had initially paid only a fraction of the fare, promising to complete the rest upon arrival in Yaounde. But now in Yaounde he is unable to do so, only pleading that Samson should let him first deliver the goods to his master and then pay him later. Because Chuks cannot pay Samson now, Samson will not allow Chuks to carry away the goods from his house. There is a deadlock, a classic 4-1-9 plot, carefully crafted to catch the unwary unawares; accordingly, to Divine's naïve eye it is a development the four of them are watching for the first time! Indeed, Divine is the sole target while the rest of the characters are interested actors.

The heated argument between Samson and Chuks ends in the exposure of the true contents of the carton; it contains not watches but money, the whopping sum of F CFA 500.000.000! which Samson vows will not leave his house. He persuades Chuks to share the money with them, and they in turn will help give him protection in Cameroon. Chuks reluctantly agrees but says that to render the money usable they will have to acquire a special liquid, a magic elixir, to transform the notes. All of them will chip in an equal amount of money to buy the liquid.

The rest of the drama unfolds in the typical manner of this kind of con story; it is here that Divine's financial ruin begins. While he does his best and brings in his own share of the money and hands it to Chuks, the rest, unknown to Divine, for the time being, contribute absolutely nothing. Each monetary contribution takes them closer to the end-process of transformation of the millions, only closer but not the end yet. Each financial contribution by Divine leaves them just with a slight hurdle to be overcome and they will all be millionaires, indeed, multimillionaires.

Whenever Divine is about to be sceptical, Karl is right there at his elbow, coaxing him and boosting his hopes, insisting that the millions are just around the corner. At any moment Divine's hopes are about to flag, there comes a 'Technician' or a 'Doctor' to reassure him that the money is genuine and needs only a little more effort to be converted into usable cash! In this way Divine eventually empties his bank account and that of his father to pay for the process that will ultimately transform him into a multimillionaire. Divine is in a dream world and begins to erect fabulous castles in the air. Extreme joy of soon becoming a millionaire, destroys his appetite and drives sleep from his eyes. But when the hard reality dawns on him, when it becomes clear beyond reasonable doubt, when Divine reckons that he has been swindled out of FCFA 8.460.000, he cracks up and takes to the street in the manner of a mad man.

In a different neighbourhood in the city of Yaounde in Samson's authentic house, the four crooks, Samson, Chuks, Karl and Ernest are gathered drinking and enjoying themselves going over the fast trick they had played on Divine. They acknowledge that he is the most foolish, the most gullible person they have ever met. It is here that we learn that Karl has had to study Divine's lifestyle and movement for about six months before finally zooming in on him. However, if the con men have ruined Divine, they will not all go unscathed themselves. The insatiable love of money will ever be the undoing of many.

Not all the money that they extracted from Divine was transparently accounted for; some of it, 2.4 million, was kept a secret between Chuks and Ernest, to be shared by both at the end of the operation. But when the

time comes for the sharing, Ernest decides to keep all of it to himself or giving only a paltry sum to Chuks. But Chuks will accept nothing less than 50% of the loot, and so a fight ensues between the disputants, attracting the public and gendarmes who pick up the culprits. Upon interrogation the latter give away the game. With the exception of Samson, the swindlers are arrested for eventual appropriate punishment.

A bald account like this can hardly do justice to Eba's beautifully crafted story. Having reached the end of the novel, we can now better appreciate what at first might have appeared as an irrelevant portion of the text – the story of the 'Three Rascals', a variation of Chaucer's, *Pardoner's Tale*, narrated in Chapter One of the novel (15-17). The moral from that story is that an uncontrolled appetite for money is the source of ruin, a reality foreshadowing the fate that befalls three of the four crooks at the end of the novel.

For the most part the story is told from the first person narrative point of view, that of Divine Fonkeng. The prologue, the epilogue and the section dealing with the arrest of the con men are narrated by the third person omniscient narrator. However, from the point of view of technique, Eba's greatest strength in this work must be situated in the psychological exploration of the main character and victim of the scam, Divine. The manner in which he handles Divine, charting the changes in his spirits from the calmness of mind to the state of nervous excitement, is psychologically realistic. Divine's fears, dreams, his plans, projects and castles in the air are all realistic. They carry the conviction of a confession by a true victim.

The novelist expertly depicts the fluttering of Divine's heart between the two binary poles of joy and sadness in the wake of the prospects of imminent possession of fabulous wealth or following the awareness of his financial ruin. In either of these extreme conditions of the human soul, the ultimate effect on Divine is restlessness, insomnia and lack of appetite, manifesting themselves in the physiological conditions of paleness and loss of weight and finally ending in the psychosomatic state of mental disorders. As a psychological case, as a study of the crisis in the soul within the context of the phenomenon of 4-1-9, the characterization of Divine is impressive indeed.

The theme of the novel relates to the tragic consequences of swindling. Put differently, the text sounds a cautionary note against the lure of easy money; for all that glitters is not gold says the old adage, an aphorism that is as valid today as it will be tomorrow. Eba's text warns us to be wary of any prospects that promise us quick, easy wealth. It is likely the beginning of financial ruin for us and, in some cases like Divine's, the precursor of a mental disaster. Herein lies the social relevance of the novel.

It is an eye-opener, a novel with the stamp of conviction of having been written by a possible victim of a scam. Many readers would learn one or two things from the novel with regard to some of the techniques of 4–1–9, only some because the phenomenon takes many forms. A close study of the process by which Divine is steadily and progressively conned out of his money would be instructive to the common reader. The subtle signals of danger that Divine ignores to his chagrin, the warnings of the inner voice that he brushes aside with the aid of rationalization, the subtle clues of linguistic ineptitude of Samson's written note that should have warned Divine that he was dealing with an impostor, but which he explains away, those brief slips of inconsistencies that drop from some of the crook's lips but which Divine sadly ignores, all of these are harbingers of danger to sharpen the reader's antennae and put him on his guard should he find himself in similar circumstances.

The *Multimillionaire* contains a few artistic weaknesses, one which has to do with artistic truthfulness in connection with setting. The novel is set in Yaounde, a predominantly French-speaking city, but everything in the story is textualised in English, whether it is in Cité Verte, Etougebe, Biyem-Assi, Essos or Obili, all of them different neighbourhoods in the capital city. The reader is not given any hint that in normal quotidian life there is the ubiquitous French language always humming away, so to speak, in the background of even Anglophone activities. It is not enough to argue that these areas are dominated by Anglophones and that all the characters are English-speaking. The reality is that French is spoken everywhere in Yaoundé, even in areas dominated by Anglophones. There are also linguistic, orthographic and grammatical errors that betray editorial shoddiness. Had the work been seriously edited, these flaws would have been greatly reduced. When well edited, the novel will be worth the reader's attention.

Notes

1. Linus T. Asong. *Stranger in His Homeland*. Bamenda: Patron Publishing House, 1994. Page references to this book are taken from this edition.
2. Linus T. Asong. *The Crown of Thorns*. Bamenda: Patron Publishing House, 1993a. Page references to this text are taken from this edition.
3. Linus T. Asong. *A Legend of the Dead*. Regina: University of Regina Press, 1991. Page references to this novel are taken from this edition.
4. Linus T. Asong. *No Way to Die*. Bamenda: Patron Publishing House 1993b. Page references to this text are taken from this edition.

5. Linus T. Asong. *Salvation Colony*. Bamenda: Patron Publishing House, 1997. Page references to this book are taken from this edition.
6. Linus T. Asong. *The Akroma File*. Bamenda: Patron Publishing House, 1996. All further page references are to this edition.
7. Talla Ngarka. *The Herbalist*. Limbe: Trans-Media Communication, 1988/Farin-Gada: Star-Link Communications, 1998. All further page references are to these editions.
8. Nsanda Eba. *The Multimillionaire*. Mankon: The Copy Printing Technology, 1998. All further page references are to this edition.

Chapter Five

Women and Sexuality

If the novelists discussed in Chapter Four are generally pre-occupied with the dark underbelly of the Cameroonian society, those in this chapter are concerned with women, particularly with hetero-sexual intimacy between a man and a woman, a relationship that, as will be seen below, often gives rise to scandalous sexual behaviour. In some cases the price to pay for sexual irresponsibility is high, indeed. The first Cameroonian to publish a major novel in English, Mbella Sonne Dipoko, is unique among Anglophone writers in the sense that unlike many of his compatriots who make their creative debut with the novelistic art form by first casting a romantic gaze at their pristine, traditional past, he eschews obsession with cultural documentation, thematizing, instead, sexual gratification. Whether the story is set in France, as his first novel *A Few Nights and Days* (1970) is, or in Cameroon, as the second *Because of Women* (1970) is, Dipoko is hugely fascinated with the subject of the erotic relationship between a man and a woman. Indeed, his novels resonate with sex and would mean much less outside the sexual context.

*A Few Nights and Days*¹, to be simply referred to hereafter as *A Few Nights*, deals with young people who fall in love in Paris where they live, work and study. There is Doumbe a Cameroonian, who is in love with a French girl, Thérèse, on the one hand, and, on the other, Laurent, a French boy in love with Bibi, a Swedish girl. Doumbe and Thérèse are seriously preparing to get married, but Thérèse's bourgeois father, M. Jacques Vaele, is so strongly opposed to the engagement that his disappointed daughter ends up committing suicide.

An important theme emerging from the text is thus the racial barrier to true love, for it is hard for M. Vaele to digest the idea that his daughter and sole child is eager to get married to a black African and to live in Africa. But an even more important theme is Doumbe's pre-occupation with sexual pleasure from women in general, a subject he intends to make the central concern of his future writing:

After Thérèse and Bibi, there was Ndome. But with her it was a return. I became involved with the three of them. It was risky. But I was going to write. I had to live, and the pleasure which women gave, their life, was the very depth of existence. I liked women. I shall write and immortalize their names: Thérèse, Bibi, Ndome, and those who had been before them, and those who will come after (65).

Promiscuity necessarily breeds infidelity, a lifestyle that defines the behaviour of the young people in love. Doumbe is a kind of sexual scoundrel, a libertine in love with Thérèse but who entertains no qualms sleeping with her best friend, Bibi. Laurent is in love with Bibi but also makes a pass at Thérèse, her confidant. On her part Bibi is not at all bothered by her conscience when she dates Doumbe even as she knows that she is in love with Laurent, Doumbe's crony. In this city game of loose sexual comportment, the faithful Thérèse stands out as the only naïve lover and greatest victim of treachery in love.

These young people's world is more or less a middle class one of relatively comfortable living, sustained by material monetary supplies, in the case of Thérèse, from lucrative capitalist investments in far away Ivory Coast where her father has a chain of businesses, or, in that of Doumbe, from the hard sweat of his peasant parents back home in Cameroon. Their lives gravitate around books, lecture-halls, dance-halls, cafés, bars and dates, conditions conducive to flirtation and falling in or out of love.

A tale constructed from a single dominant focalization, Doumbe's, *A Few Nights* is a readable, lyrical narrative that is difficult for the reader to drop until he has reached the end. Through the agency of the focalizer, the author then brings in the dramatic dimension wherein he introduces the other characters to expose their feelings, emotions and thoughts. On the whole the characters are realistically constructed, and the dialogues beautifully realized. Though scripted in English the text's original medium is French, the dominant language of the milieu, spontaneous, idiomatic French bits of which occasionally come across to the reader in the original quotations.

Dipoko depicts certain scenes completely and logically and, therefore, in a satisfying manner. Among them one must include Doumbe's encounters with Bibi as he cleverly tries to persuade her to yield to his carnal desires; above all, his confrontations with Thérèse's parents are beautifully constructed. The climax of the latter is the unforgettable lunch party at the Vaeles' where, to M Vaele's greatest shock, Doumbe drops a bombshell, so to speak, in the midst of the family gathered around the lunch-table, by telling the accusing 19-year-old Thérèse, with regard to parental opposition to their imminent wedding, 'It's your parents. Not mine. Ask them'(177).

In terms of timing and the exquisite sense of irony of situation, nothing could be more dramatically appropriate. The truth is bitter, and when it is spoken, the effect can be dramatic, but in this case, it is tragic. Thérèse's parents, particularly the father, turn scarlet, an effect made even greater by the beetroots in their plates. Doumbe's devastating declaration is the very thing M Vaele has been scheming to discourage in his previous meetings

with him when he waged a psychological war on the young man in an attempt to keep him away from his sensitive daughter; it is the last thing he therefore expected to hear from Doumbe's lips at this critical moment. The tragic consequence of what Thérèse considers her parents' capital betrayal is that the girl moves from the lunch-table to her death bed. We reproduce here the high point of the scene which concludes Chapter 17 of the novel:

Thésèse looked up.

'Doumbe,' she said, 'you won't leave France without me. You understand? Rain or no rain we're going together. If you leave me behind I'll kill myself, you understand? Whether your parents like it or not we're going to Africa'.

'Why my parents?'

She put her elbow on the table, her head resting on her hand as she looked at me, almost contemptuously.

'Doumbe, why do you lie?' Thérèse asked. 'Tell me ... Isn't it true that your parents don't want me? Isn't it true that it's they who have asked you not to bring me? Doumbe, isn't it true that it's because of your parents? They don't want us to get married? But you're twenty-three. You can do whatever you want. You're a man. If you really loved me, Doumbe, you'd ignore your parents. You can do it'.

'No, Thérèse,' I said. 'It's your parents. Not mine. Ask them'.

I sat back. Thérèse also sat back and gazed into the blood-red beetroot on her plate. Her parents had turned scarlet.

Then raising her look heavily and directing it with restrained cruelty at her father, Thérèse asked:

'Papa, is it true?'

The dining-room was clear. Monsieur Vaele's face was twisted with pain and shame and an unrelenting determination – this I imagine – not to give up the fight, a determination to win.

'Monsieur Vaele, reply to your daughter,' I told him. 'Let us get married. You won't be the first Frenchman to allow his daughter to marry an African. There are French people who have understood, after some resistance. Their daughters are in Africa. Some parents even visit them. You could do the same. You could visit us and we'd come to France from time to time. Say yes, Monsieur Vaele. I'd postpone my departure. Thérèse and I could be married here in Paris within a fortnight. Say yes, Monsieur Vaele'.

But Thérèse's father remained silent, his chin against his chest.

'Papa, I'm asking you', Thérèse moaned. 'Is it true?'

‘Monsieur Vaele, reply to your daughter,’ I said, hoping to force out of him the consent he had been withholding for weeks. Not actually to force, but to make him change his stand.

‘Maman,’ the girl said, addressing herself to her mother. ‘Is it true?’ Without looking at her daughter, Madame Vaele said:

‘Thérèse, ask your father.’

But her father remained scarlet and silent.

Then Thérèse pushed back her chair and got up. She looked from her father to her mother, from her mother to her father. She sighed and came to me. She held out her hand.

‘I understand,’ she said. ‘Good-bye and a safe journey ... Shake my hand’ (177-178).

For a first fruit of fictional endeavour, this first-person narrative is, technically speaking, an impressive piece of work. At the time it was published, *A Few Nights* announced Dipoko as a writer of promise and, to go by the publisher’s blurb on the cover of *Because of Women*, ‘a rare talent’. Though not a faultless novel as will be seen below, *A Few Nights*, in our view, cannot be faulted for the most serious technical flaws that became the focus of charges levelled against the first wave of African novels by early Western critics of the African novel, as summed up by Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike (1983) in the following words:

For instance, with respect to *technique*, some African novels are said to suffer from inadequate description or inadequate characterization, motivation, psychology and depth, or from unrealistic and awkward dialogue, or from alleged problems in the conception and handling of time and space. Others are faulted for being too short or for having thin plots or no plots at all. With respect to their *themes*, some novels are denounced as “situational,” and the critical literature is filled with reprimanding laments that too many African novels are autobiographical or preoccupied with culture conflict or unnecessarily fascinated with the African past. With respect to *ideological* matters, some critics claim that there is too much didacticism or not enough of the right kind. Some cry out for what they consider a “consistent moral attitude,” and others denounce what they call “protest literature,” “topicality,” anthropological or journalistic documentation, and “local colour.” (7-8)

Most of these charges were misguided anyway, for, as Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike (1983) contend, the critics fail to take into consideration

several important facts: (1) The African novel is a hybrid out of the African oral tradition and the imported literary forms of Europe, and it is precisely this hybrid origin which needs most to be considered when determining what technical charges could legitimately be made against African novels. (2) The African novel's primary constituency is different from that of the European or other regional novels, and it would be foolhardy to try to impose upon it expectations from other constituencies. (3) The colonial situation imposes a different set of concerns and constraints upon the African novel than upon novels of the imperialist nations. The African novel therefore has every cause to be concerned with issues antithetical to those which the imperialist countries would prefer to see treated in their literatures. (8)

Sexual pleasure, the joy of lovemaking is the main theme of Dipoko's next novel, *Because of Women*², set in the creeks between the Southwest and the Littoral provinces of Cameroon. If, in the previous narrative, Doumbe is obsessed with women, Ngoso in the second is even a greater womanizer:

Then he began to touch Ewudu's breasts in order to excite her again and it was easy because he was still in her, strong and straight and presently he was on her again and he was saying to himself that it was because, yes, because, because of women that life was really good, yes, really good (73).

The creek dwellers, in this text, habitually indulge in sex. In Ewudu, the central female subject, we have a nymphomaniac ruled by a single overwhelming passion: that of sexually making the best use of the moment, of seizing the day, the *Carpe Diem* theme so beloved of some Metaphysical poets:

She knew of death and was aware of what it would mean to her body. Her breasts and her beautiful thing would become mere earth. So why not make proper use of her body while she was still alive? That was why she was very liberal with men for she wanted them to take advantage of the fact that they had better make frequent use of what the earth would waste (17).

Dreaming of founding a large family, Ngoso, the central male subject impregnates Njale. But at times he is very cruel to the woman carrying his child and so infatuated with another woman, Ewudu, Ekema's fiancée, that

Ngoso imagines his life will be meaningless without the irresistible, sexy woman. But Njale would not tolerate another woman, much less Ewudu, under the same roof. Ewudu then leaves for Douala from where she accompanies a prostitute to Nkongsamba. After sometime, the now pregnant Ewudu returns, carrying Ngoso's child. A changed woman, Ewudu has great dreams of living happily with Ngoso, only to learn of the latter's death.

Unlike *A Few Nights* that focalizes events solely through the consciousness of Doumbe, *Because of Women* is a third person narration that records events largely through Ngoso with, of course, variations appropriate to this mode of narrative perspective. On the whole, the narration of *Because of Women* does not match the unrelieved narrative smoothness and delicacy of the earlier text. The narrative style of the second novel straggles a bit, so that, at times, the reader feels like skipping a portion here and there to get back to the track of the central story.

Yet, for all this, *Because of Women* is, to some extent, a technical advance of *A Few Nights*, especially in the deployment of effective flashbacks, in the use of a variant of the forward approach or prolepsis by Ngoso as he is 'living his vision of tomorrow and the months and years after tomorrow' (146), in the onomatopoeic simulation of the rumbling train bringing Ewudu from Nkongsamba, 'suku – suku – suku – suku...' (164).

Dipoko equally endows Ngoso and Ewudu with interesting internal monologues wherein the reader becomes absorbed in the imaginative, mental life of the characters. The overall effect is psychological or realistic exploration of character, a technical point for which, as we have seen above, some African novelists have been faulted, but which remains one of Dipoko's strengths.

Dipoko is a very objective novelist, taking no sides with his characters. As a third person narrator, he does not insult his characters as Ayi Kwei Armah sometimes does in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) and *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979). However, Dipoko creates characters to carry out any insults against the others, maintaining thus his aesthetic distance.

The novelist is also good at effective set-piece descriptions of the sexual act, although as Donald Carter rightly observes, 'these descriptions come in rather randomly, opportunity being mistaken, as one might say, for opportuneness' (Carter 140). A good example of the description of an explicit sexual act is on pages 71 – 73 when purportedly walking to the waterfront to carry plantains one evening, Ngoso and Ewudu stop in a dark market stall to make love. Evidently the novelist is here pandering to low tastes, to the salacious desires of adolescents and all those obsessed with pornography and voyeurism, obscene material that is likely to offend the sensibilities of refined readers.

From the criterion of social significance, Dipoko's novels, impressive as they may be as works of art, are lacking in moral seriousness. Commenting on Dipoko's two novels, O.R.Dathorne (108) says 'No moral judgments are passed in these books-perhaps that is their greatest appeal.' By and large Dathorne is right when he posits that the novelist passes no moral judgments. But when he goes on to add that 'perhaps that is their greatest appeal', one is almost tempted to ask, 'greatest appeal' to whom? What is wrong in a moral statement artistically worked into a novel? And we are not talking here of a moral tag literally appended to the end of a tale. There is nothing wrong in a moral comment emerging out of the organic structure of a creative work.

Even though the absence of moral judgments in Dipoko's novels may recommend them to Western critics like Dathorne, in a developing, postcolonial country like Cameroon we have our own concerns that are opposed to those of the West; we must demand that a serious novelist's work have some social relevance to its society. We believe that as a creator, the novelist bears some moral responsibility over his creation. From this conspectus one would not expect important novels to be devoted to the exploration of the theme of irresponsible sexuality without any strong satirical, call it moral, statement woven artistically into them by the artist. One is more likely to concur with Donald Carter (1971) in his statement that because Ngoso the womanizer is not treated 'sardonically, satirically, bravely...., there is a want of sympathy of an adequately felt engagement that is either with the normal sort of hero.... Instead there is a feel of embarrassment about the story' (140).

In times as bleak as ours, unrestricted sexuality is ultimately an ethical issue, one of whether a sexual behaviour is morally right or wrong. True, Dipoko's works are set in a period when AIDS was non-existent. However, this is not an excuse for handling sexuality without morality. Promiscuity breeds infidelity; infidelity engenders conflict; and conflict leads to the destruction of a healthy relationship. So a promiscuous married man or woman is one playing with dangerous fire that may consume the foundation of a union.

But Dipoko's characters wallow in sexual frivolity with hardly any scruples at all. Where their consciences seem to be jerked, the effect is mild and of no consequence. Sexuality is presented but not debated. Early in her relationship with Doumbe, in *A Few Nights*, Bibi appears to be a moral foil for the capricious young man when she advises him to be faithful to his fiancée. However, this appeal elicits but curt sarcasm from Doumbe:

(Bibi): 'You must try to be faithful to her.'

(Doumbe): 'Good advice; damn good advice ...' (23).

But soon afterwards Bibi loses this apparent moral authority as she herself succumbs to Doumbe's erotic desires, both of them betraying Thérèse, respectively a close friend and a lover. When Doumbe comments on this act of treachery, it is hardly with a troubled conscience: 'What Bibi and I had just done only confirmed to me that Thérèse was an unfortunate girl. She loved me, trusted me; she loved and trusted Bibi. And there we were, both of us betraying the naive confidence she had in us' (*A Few Nights* 36).

Similarly, in his irresponsible womanizing, Ngosso occasionally feels his conscience prick him; but no sooner does this happen than it is buried under the overriding impulse of his dominating id. Even characters like Mwenen, Njale, Inon and Etata make ineffectual protest against his philandering lifestyle and infatuation for Ewudu. In the hands of a different novelist, the elderly Old Dikodu might have made a wise moral icon for the ethical guidance of youthful Ngoso, but in *Because of Women*, he is not. In the final analysis, therefore, Dipoko's vision of life must be recognized as an incomplete one.

It is not easy to discern Dipoko's attitude to the vision of life conjured by his imagination. His tone of voice, a crucial factor for the interpretation of the novels and an important aspect of their meaning, is hermetically sealed, as it were. To be sure authorial tone of voice can make sense only in a third person narrative like *Because of Women*; in contrast, in *A Few Nights*, there is no room for the author's tone of voice since it is a first person narration focalized by Doumbe.

However, from a psycho biographical perspective, there is a connection between Doumbe and Dipoko. Time and again, in *A Few Nights*, Doumbe makes it clear that he is from Doula in Cameroon. In his meeting with M Vaele on page 99 he reveals that before arriving in France for studies, he had spent some time in Nigeria. This itinerary of the virtual character from Cameroon to France, passing through Nigeria, happens to be exactly the very one followed by Dipoko the novelist, if one were to go by the biographical summary on the covers of the two novels, making thus inevitable an autobiographical linkage between the novelist and his central male subject. In other words it seems probable that Doumbe's story is, to some extent, Dipoko's. The significance of this close parallel between the creator and the creation resides in the fact that the character's tone of voice or attitude is one likely to reflect the author's, or one which the novelist is likely to endorse.

Consequently, if the carefree attitude of his central male characters, Doumbe and Ngoso, who are anti – heroes obsessed with sexual pleasure, is anything to go by, one can only conclude that Dipoko seems to glorify women and the life they radiate. At least he appears to shrug off his vision

of life as if to say: That is life; c'est comme ça la vie. All things considered, there is no doubt that Mbella Sonne Dipoko's place in the history of the development of the Cameroon novel of English expression is assured by his two novels. On the purely artistic plane, they remain impressive imaginative creations. However, in Cameroon and Africa today when everywhere sowers and promoters of sexual promiscuity are reaping the bitter fruits of sexual irresponsibility, novels like Dipoko's, devoted to the celebration of debauchery without a strong moral alternative, will appear, to say the least, revolting and something of an aberration to decent readers.

Having said this, however, we must concede that an evaluative reading of Dipoko's fiction such as we have just articulated, is but an alternative way of interpreting his work. Some would argue that it is only a colonial way of looking at his novels, and one that would be vigorously contested by the postcolonial critic. The latter would contend that Mbella Sonne Dipoko's obsessive depiction of sexuality may well be for him what constitutes his 'novelistic postcoloniality', for

in postcolonial parlance, there is no such a thing as a taboo, as unseriousness as opposed to seriousness; there is only such a thing as possibilities, novelties, disjunctures... de-tabooing. For the colonial sex is a taboo; for the postcolonial sex is not a problematic but an art, an exploration, an imagination, and therefore it is evolutionary rather than static (Ndi).

Another novelist who handles the theme of irresponsible sexuality is Ngoran C. Tardzenyuy, in his work *Nyuysham* (2002b)³. But unlike Dipoko who does not dwell on moral sexual lessons, Ngoran in his novel artistically makes an attempt to articulate the tragic consequences of sexual sin. 'Nyuysham' which in Lamnso roughly means 'God have mercy,' focuses on the woes of Nyuysham, the central male subject, from whom the text derives its title.

Nyuysham is a man who seems cursed to bring disaster unto himself and his whole family through his frivolous sexual lifestyle. His sexual scandals lead to the break-up of his large family of 15 children. It is his peculiar ill-luck that his inordinate sexual desires result in abominable acts. His ex-wife sets up herself as a prostitute in a brothel, and, without knowing it, Nyuysham secretly courts, and makes love to her under darkness, and this to a woman he had earlier lost appetite in. He is cursed to commit incest (again unknown to him) with his own daughter now also a harlot. Above all, Nyuysham is doubly doomed, as it were, to lure and rape his own minor (another daughter of his without knowing it still), an incestuous

affair that condemns him to prison. And it is another ironic coincidence that Nyuysham is locked up in the same cell containing, among other hardened criminals, his two, grown-up sons. Upon setting eyes on the felons, he collapses and dies.

These rather contrived instances of coincidence constitute a structural weakness that undermines the text's artistic coherence. But the novel is shot through with other artistic flaws. On page 168 the novelist says of Nyuysham that 'with impunity he had abandoned his wife and children, and had taken to a life of alcoholism, drug addiction and debauchery...' While there is sufficient evidence in the novel that Nyuysham is a lecher, the idea of his being an alcoholic has not been convincingly established; similarly, there is no trace of any drug addiction on the part of the man. Therefore, if it was the novelist's intention to portray Nyuysham as a failure due to alcoholism and drug addiction, he has not succeeded in doing so.

Besides, the author conceives an anti-hero with a large family of 15 children. But not in a single scene does he make us see them; neither does he evoke the sense of a large family, nor does he conjure a home with a teeming, noisy atmosphere, typical of a large rural African family. We do not hear nor do we see the children until, and only briefly, at the end. But the greatest technical fault in this novel is the tendency for the omniscient narrator to explain too much, especially with regard to Nso culture, to be condescending at times vis-à-vis the reader. In other words the narrator tends to talk down to the reader, leaving nothing to the latter's imagination. Characteristic indicators of this 'explanation' are expressions such as 'Usually if in the Nso land; 'In Nso land,' 'This was how the Fon was...', (39, 40, 41, 44, 56, 58, 127, 131 etc.)

In a flashback portion of the narrative dealing with the wedding of Wànfon and Shamla, the narrator describes the nuptials in advance of the event. This is done by Yeèla through the prompting of Yensii, a device that deprives the descriptions of their dramatic impact and resonance. Having said this, however, if one compares Ngoran's *Nyuysham* with his earlier novel, *Victims of Circumstances* (2002), which will be considered by and by, one will notice some technical improvement. The plot of *Nyuysham* is much less diffuse, even if still episodic; in the second novel the focus is now on the woes of an individual, Nyuysham, with a clear theme emerging from the text: the wages of sexual sin is death. There is more depiction of local colour in *Nyuysham* than one finds in the largely colourless setting of *Victims of Circumstances*. There is more artistic discipline brought to bear on language use in the second novel; the obvious, self-conscious linguistic attempt to impress by the dilettante of the first novel is much less in evidence in *Nyuysham*. Now, there is greater effort on the part of the narrator to be

natural, to be himself. There are also some well-told stories in the flashback section of the text when school children tell stories in class; however, beyond contributing to local colour the strict artistic function of these tales is doubtful.

Even though the opening page of the novel seems deliberately written to offend the reader in its depiction of filth and dilapidation, it is symbolically functional. The shaky and physical dilapidation of Nyuysham's house foreshadows what is to become of the man and his family. It points to the imminent collapse of Nyuysham and his household on the ground of moral depravity. *Nyuysham*, in this regard, echoes here Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The inter-textual echoes of both novels affirm the idea that morally upright Africans are still to be born.

Our interest in Ngoran's first novel, *Victims of Circumstances* (2002) is less on account of its treatment of the theme of sexuality than on the author's clear linguistic claims. The novel is the story of the social problems faced, in turn, by Lajay and Sammoa, respectively father and son. Lajay is a hard-working village trader in cola-nuts but who gets into all sorts of troubles with other villagers including his son. On the other hand Sammoa his son is a promising pupil who sails through the primary and secondary school, and makes it to the university, but not without having his own share of frustration and victimization.

Victims of Circumstances (2002a)⁴ is, by the author's tacit and disarming admission, an apprentice work (5). In the preface Ngoran defines his targeted audience; he affirms that his text 'was conceived and executed first and foremost, for the upper forms of the secondary' (5). The author makes it clear that he considers his use of language in this novel his forte:

Without the slightest intention to blow my own trumpet, I dare say that care was taken to make sure the language used therein was appropriate for its intended readership. That is why after reading its manuscript among other works, Alison Thomas managing editor of Minerva Press, U.K. praised this aspect of the work so highly (5).

Now, a declaration like this should tell any critic wishing to assess the artistic achievement of the author that the latter's handling of language in the novel must be a crucial consideration; however, in our humble view, it is precisely the use of language that we find to be the most obvious weakness of *Victims of Circumstances*. While the author displays grammatical competence as he endows his characters and the omniscient narrator with correct grammatical sentences, he, nevertheless, betrays a lack of linguistic sensitivity; that is, Ngoran's use of English in this novel reveals a penchant

for inflationary language that makes many of his characters unnecessarily bookish and, therefore, strange in the contexts. In other words his characters talk out of character.

One example is provided by a Kekom Co-operative meeting wherein an illiterate villager, Lājay addresses the chairman, Virom, in an idiom characterised by foreign concepts and ideas that would not have been available to him:

You're not different from the whites in South Africa. You behave like the racist Pieta Botha. We denounce apartheid in all its forms. Before you came, we were knitted together under the banner of unity and indivisibility but you came, drugged us with cocaine and marijuana and now we tear one another in a fratricidal gladiatorial show which gives you much pleasure. Your religion of development has borne as many dangerous ramifications in our village as those of Christianity in the world today (13).

On page 26 the very illiterate but Christian Lajay, in urging his family to hurry up and get to church one Sunday morning, sounds like an enthusiastic secondary school science student eager to parade his knowledge of the elements of chemistry. Stressing the importance of God in their lives, Lajay says rather pompously, 'He is catalyst to human reactions and, like *potassium permanganate in the preparation of sulphuric acid*, activates our efforts towards the realization of great things'. (My italics)

On his part Taata Wirnso another illiterate villager and cola-nut trader, in sermonizing his companion on the virtue of keeping to time and respecting principles, has to affect philosophizing, little knowing that he himself is fighting verbosity with verbosity:

Yesterday you said that before cock-crow everybody should be ready for the journey. Let's not, like the Old Testament Pharisees, preach virtue and practise vice; let's not always only deploy profanities at the expense of actions that ought to sanction the validity of our utterances. Theory without practice is nonsense, but practice without theory is sense. Therefore, we better be pragmatists, field workers and not bookish theorists. Do you know that our development stalemate is the capital consequence of the empty verbosity of the majority of our leaders? (32).

If in these examples illiterate adults sound funny, children do not always fare better. On page 23 Lajay's family members are together one evening, peeling cola-nuts. As they are chatting, Wymo, one of Lajay's sons going to primary school, displays a discourse that places him at a higher level of intellectualism than one appropriate for a pupil of his level:

What paa has said is from experience and not from any obnoxious and theoretical bookishness. In fact the best knowledge is not necessarily that acquired through laborious years of bench-sitting and certificate-piling. King Solomon and Shakespeare, transcendent as they were, hadn't as many certificates as the countless number of dunces we find today carrying baskets of unjustified doctorates and permanently inculcating nonsensical stuff into the baby brains of our future leaders. If paa, illiterate so you may think, can bring up such a hypothesis on schooling and defend so efficiently, why then has he been deprived of the right to a doctorate? (23).

Some critics may defend the novelist on the grounds that he endows his characters with this idiom in order to ridicule them, exposing their pomposity. If this were the case, that would be all right; the characters' language would then be appropriate. But there is little evidence in the text to suggest that the author is satirizing the characters. A good reason for saying this is that even the third person omniscient narrator (implicitly the author himself) is not free from this tendency towards bombast. That is, both the characters and the novelist at times sound the same, hence no linguistic distinction. The narrator's inflated idiom can be spotted on pages 7, 34, 81, and 128, to indicate only these few.

True, flamboyant, self-conscious linguistic expressions such as we have pointed out are likely to be admired and imitated by Cameroonian high school students, the targeted audience of the author. But this does not make such language artistically acceptable. When people in a novel behave out of character, the work suffers from lack of artistic truthfulness or verisimilitude.

A different novel whose author has explored the theme of sexuality but has demonstrated a greater mastery of the English language is *Esther* (1993)⁵ by Langha Kizito. *Esther* is the story of an attractive, innocent village school girl around whom men hover, and who eventually becomes a whore. She gets into trouble in a bar when men, fighting over her, sustain injuries in a brawl that results in a lawsuit. Esther escapes a prison term only because she is pregnant.

The young man with the longest love relationship with her is Victor Lenja, a naïve Form V student also in love with a classmate of his, Edith. Physically strong and academically sound, Victor is, however, simple and immature with regard to the ways of the world. In this connection his inexperience comes to light early in the novel when he is literally 'raped' by Alice, a beautiful oversexy housewife (27-28). But it is through his links with Esther, the central female subject of the text, that Victor's naïvete is most clearly revealed. His relationship with her leads him to some misadventures that leave their psychosomatic scars on him.

The novel *Esther* consists of six chapters, each of which is prefaced by a statement. When grouped together, these statements appear as follows: 'The beginning of all knowledge is observation. The goal of it is clear comprehension. Maturity is the result of the slow growth of powers. Ripening takes time. It cannot be hurried without harm. But there's a fool who merely lack (sic) wisdom.'

A major theme emerging from the text is the slow growth to maturity. It is not easy to attain the age of maturity and wisdom although for some people (especially girls, in relation to sexual matters) maturity may come faster than in others. This then comes out clearly from the characterization of Victor Lenja, the male protagonist. He is an 18-year-old Form V student, physically strong and academically sound, but with regard to the ways of the world, very naïve.

In Victor Lenja this theme blends with that of sexuality; for his relationship with women brings this to light. Early in the novel the inexperienced school boy is virtually raped by a housewife (27-28). However, it is in his romantic relationship with Esther, the female protagonist, that most of Victor's immaturity with the world of women is revealed. He does not see the danger of leaving a delicate letter for Esther in the hands of the latter's mother who opposes their relationship (50). Early in the novel Victor and Esther have a mutual sexual attraction for each other; later in the text that attraction is mostly one-sided, from the part of Victor. He is aware of Esther's love affair with Chief Fanka, and even seeing them in bed naked; he is equally aware that Esther is a prostitute over whom people have got into trouble. Yet Victor entertains a childish interest in her even when she uses all types of ruses to discourage him since she is now pregnant by someone else, and therefore beyond him.

But Victor does not notice what is only too plain to others. Esther tells him, 'You are funny, Victor. And blind. You don't see things' (151). Two pages later she says: 'You should grow up, Victor. You need to grow up ... It doesn't really matter, anyway' (153). In Bamenda Victor buys drugs to give Esther who tells him she is ill. But his neighbour, Richard, aware that Esther

is pregnant and therefore not seriously ill, tells him 'women are like that when they are in that state (157). The naïve Victor asks 'what state?' to which Richard replies: 'Grow up, boy. When you grow up you'll know' (158).

The depiction of Alice's seduction of Victor Lenja, Esther's life as a prostitute, prostitution in Tiko and Bamenda, and the melodramatic rape of Edith near the end of the novel gives the reader an idea of the extent of sexual immorality in the early post-independence Cameroonian society with regard to the Anglophone part of the country. Unlike in Dipoko's works, in Kizito's *Esther* irresponsible sexuality can lead to a criminal sexual offense. A case in point is that of Esther the prostitute whose unfairness to two rival lovers soliciting sex from her in Street Four in Tiko ends up in a dangerous fight with criminal consequences. Esther incurs a criminal sexual charge in the High Court at Victoria where Justice Whole Bate, handling the case, 'talked of prostitution and corruption of youth, and dwelt on public indecency' (180). Esther began to cry when the judge concluded, 'For the rest they are all serious offenses whose penalties the Head of State prescribed in the recent ordinances' 181. The prostitute is remanded in custody, but because she is pregnant, 'she shall be subject to special conditions and treatment to be determined by the Attorney General' (181). Thus in *Esther* sexual immorality, when firmly established, is punishable by law. Now, the broad theme of moral depravity is deepened by Victor's eventful encounter with Esther's father, Mr. Bingla, head of the *Nyongo* society, a diabolic cult that feeds on human flesh and drinks human blood to attain earthly material prosperity (112 – 127). Even though Langha Kizito has thus explored sexuality as a theme, he equally consciously employs it as a device of technique to arouse the reader's interest in his narrative and enhance the readability of his work.

The novelist judiciously spreads out across the text descriptive sexual scenes. The first two sentences of the novel accordingly carry a strong sexual appeal: 'Give me' I pleaded, nestling closer to Esther. She giggled and stuck her tongue out, closing her eyes and sending her arms around my neck.' (1) This sexual beginning, so to speak, is reinforced on page 11 with a touching female declaration of youthful love. Then comes the high point of sexual sensationalism when Alice, the oversexy housewife, seduces Victor Lenja on pages 27 – 28, a set piece deliberately worked into the text to gratify the readers' taste for salacious stuff and therefore, to keep them reading. In the middle of the novel there are Esther's sexual activities as a prostitute, and then, close to the end of the book, there is that other piece of melodramatic, if tasteless, description of the brutal rape of Edith 'tied to three trees which formed a triangle' (174 – 175). Here voyeurism clearly serves as the handmaiden of readability.

However, if in these and other outstanding descriptive passages the author shows a good mastery of the English language, his narrative, nevertheless, betrays some missing links that vitiate the text's artistic truthfulness, narrative gaps within his story which do not enhance its verisimilitude. Some of these artistic flaws include Victor's failure to confront Esther with the idea of fake letters linked to Ndonkoh's shadowy appearances, his inability to face her with the grim reality of her father's *Nyongo* connection, nor to disclose the contents of the sensitive letter that has fallen into the hands of Esther's mother, opposed to their relationship.

The other narrative weakness, an idiosyncrasy, is the narrator's occasional resort to a formula, an odd coincidence, when out of steam, as it were, to cover up his lack of ideas to continue the story. This occasionally happens when Esther is in a fix, when she is confronted with a difficult question she cannot easily answer. At such a time an opportune event, a kind of *deus ex machina* would come in, to save her from an embarrassment. The first person narrator, Victor Lenja, would then say 'whatever she would have said, Esther was saved the trouble of doing so unwillingly' (36), 'Once more Esther was saved the trouble of answering a question unwillingly. At that point my father broke in '(59).

No serious discussion of this novel will be complete without an attempt to situate the place of the character called Billy within its scheme of things. A teacher and the symbol of wisdom, Billy is a foil for Victor with reference to maturity. After a few disappointing experiences with women, Billy has withdrawn to himself and become cynical about them. In his view 'All women are wicked' (138) and 'a mean incarnation of the devil' (159). 'Wherever they are, peace, justice and security vanish' (159). Here Billy demonises women, but fails to demonstrate this convincingly in a manner, for example, comparable to that of L. T. Asong with the evil geniuses in *The Akroma File* (1996) and *Salvation Colony* (1997), wherein one notices a conscious planning and execution of evil by Akroma and Shrapnell, the central male subjects of the texts.

If there is a potential devil in the novel *Esther* it is that *Nyongo* man, Bingla, Esther's father. And surely the other heartless man in the novel must be that cruel bestial man who brutally rapes Edith (144 - 145). Even the shadowy Ndonkoh with his vicious attacks on Victor is a man crueler than any woman in the text. Echoing Shakespeare's character Hamlet, it cannot be poetically and convincingly said of the woman in this novel that cruelty, thy name is woman.

Though he claimed to be wise, Billy makes contradictory statements at times. Regarding the woman as 'mean' he asks Victor, 'Now, can you tell me how these mean things found their way into your life' (161). But just on

the next page he contradicts himself when he scoffs at Victor's reference to women as trifles, Billy says 'calling women trifles! I have told you already Victor that they aren't' (162).

A different novel in which sexuality features as an important theme and a text involving two women in a polygamous home who intentionally plan and successfully carry out the act of infidelity in a sustained manner is Francis Nyamnjoh's *A Nose for Money* (2006)⁶. Set in a fictional African country called Mimboland and depicting the changing fortunes of its central male subject, Prospère, *A Nose for Money* is a classic tale of a man growing from rags to riches. A semi-illiterate and a struggling truck driver with the Mimboland Brewery Company (MBC), Prospère nurses the ambition to be a rich man one day, and, accordingly, begins to save towards that end. As luck would have it, a financial windfall comes his way one fortunate day, catapulting him unto greater financial heights, thanks to his timely connection with his tribesman and government minister, Mr. Matiba.

Mimboland, particularly its capital city Nyamandem, is a society in the grip of materialism and the crave for pleasures of the flesh; the text reveals the accentuated predominance of the quest for lucre and the pursuit of sex, the two related aspects of the overarching theme of moral decadence. Unlike in Nyamnjoh's two earlier novels, politics does not take centre stage here; however, it pulsates in the background, manifesting itself indirectly through the economic activities and the financial malpractice the text highlights. Since the government in power is 'the number one contractor and consumer in the entire country, what businessman or citizen could stand on his feet without the government's benediction?' asks Matiba. (141)

Therefore, those who carry out successful business activities in the society are individuals who have connection with government ministers. Prospère is phenomenally rich because of his links with the minister whom he bribes and corrupts so as to be awarded juicy contracts and granted business licenses to carry out his extensive chain of businesses. Thanks to his identification with the political party in power and accessibility to insider information, Prospère can very easily spot lucrative contracts. He 'oils the lips' and 'scratches the back' of the Director of Customs and the Minister of Finance to import expensive goods under subterfuge, paying virtually no taxes on them. As a consequence, it is the state that loses billions of CFA Francs in tax revenue which go into private pockets.

Owing to the infamous practices of oiling of lips, of scratching of backs and of goats eating only where they are tethered (170), the author exposes the sleazy processes that produce the wealthy Prospères and the government ministers who ruin the country's economy for their own personal wealth. Prospère is now numbered among the five richest men in the country. It

was this mad pursuit of mammon, this crave for filthy lucre that twice placed Mimboland on the top of the corruption chart, 'a game that had made Mimboland world leader for two consecutive years' (159).

Now what does a minister, a director or a businessman with excess filthy money on his hands do? They consume it and they do so in grand, arrogant style. They dress expensively and drive prestigious cars, imitating 'La fieté de Francais' (139); they provide cars for their wives; they put up fabulous villas in the elitist petit Paris neighbourhood, and send their children to study in France. But, above all, to slake their appetite for things of the flesh, they look for young girls, 'young juicy fruit(s)' (157) on whom they shower their wealth. Here emerges the text's second related theme of sexuality and marital unfaithfulness.

The types of girls these tycoons go in for are those of university and high school levels. These are the Marie Claires, the Charlottes, the Chantals and the Moniques, pampered and spoilt with ill-gotten money, fripperies and trendy dresses. The sponsors and keepers of these young girls are mostly married men with wives at home. One thing is therefore clear: they are cheating on their wives, regardless of whether they eventually marry the younger women.

But the girls themselves are no fools. True, because of their insatiable appetite for money and material possessions peculiar to women, they stick to their sugar daddies, preying on their wealth as much as possible. However, for optimal sexual satisfaction, these young girls or wives, in turn, look elsewhere. They secretly keep and provide for young, virile lovers 'for the purposes of thorough libidinal servicing' (143). So, of the central married female characters in the novel – Rose, Marie-Claire, Charlotte, Chantal and Monique, only the latter can be credited with fidelity. The rest, like the men they are married to, are all guilty of infidelity.

From Prospère's bitter experiences regarding the unfaithfulness of Rose, it dawns on him that women are impossible to live with; but, as his subsequent, bootless efforts to look for the alienated Rose and come to an understanding with her indicate, it is also impossible to live without women. The same paradox is at work in the lives of Charlotte and Chantal, Prospère's first and second wives who share a mutual sexual secret unknown to their husband until the last few pages of the narrative: that he is sterile, hence their secret love affairs outside wedlock. In their view, then, it is impossible, for the sake of procreation, to live with their husband; but it is equally impossible, because of his wealth, to live without him. Paradoxically then, the wives cannot live with their husband, but they cannot live without him.

A parallel infidelity is the relationship between the wealthy spinster, Lizette, a woman in her mid-forties, and her young virile lover, Théodore. Théodore proves his unfaithfulness to the woman by inviting a more 'succulent' girl friend to make love to him in Lizette's house!

Now, concerning Prospère and his wives, when the crucial truth from the other side of the sexual divide is revealed to the man at the end of the novel, it kills him. All along, Prospère had been knocking his chest of being the proud father of eight children. Alas, they have all been fathered by other men! All along Prospère has been the only 'fool'. The man commits suicide. Indeed, 'La vérité blesse.'

However, fatal as their revelation is, the women's infidelity is not the sole cause of Prospère's demise. His is partly a self-inflicted tragedy; he is the author of his own downfall, given his track record of sexual recklessness. Prior to coming upon his windfall that propelled him onto greater financial heights, enabling him to access more attractive young women, Prospère, had led a life of sexual wantonness. He had contracted venereal diseases and resorted to self-medication instead of seeking standard medical treatment. Part of the punishing revelation is that, unknown to him, Prospère, has killed his own beloved wife through an incurable disease running in his blood and now in that of his remaining two wives. On the last page of the text a police officer voices the moral of Prospère's tragedy: 'Don't they say as you make your bed so shall you lie on it?' (202), an axiom expressed earlier by the omniscient narrator when he said, 'the future never forgives the reckless past' (28). So, one need not be a great, perceptive reader to realize that nemesis has finally caught up with Prospère: the wages of sexual recklessness is death, a dictum of great resonance in promiscuous times like ours.

From the point of view of technique, *A Nose for Money* is quite a different text from Nyamnjoh's two previous novels, *Mind Searching* (1991) and *The Disillusioned African* (1995). Written in a modernist mode, the earlier novels are texts wherein the author, like the modernist novelists, has thrown overboard much that is commonly considered indispensable to the novel, making instead, for example, elaborate use of the stream-of-consciousness technique and the lack of chronology in his narration. In contrast, *A Nose for Money* bears the hallmarks of the traditional novel. There is a discernible plot, a conflict and a description of people and places; there are arousing, dramatic scenes, climaxes and conclusions; unlike the pale and vague ciphers of *Mind Searching*, we have in the latest novel solid, identifiable and realistic human characters.

The high readability of this novel resides in its suspenseful story, its crisp prose, the surprising twists in its plot, its interesting instances of irony of situation, the lively characters and their mutual infidelities, the paradoxicality of the sexes, and the colourful rumours surrounding the phenomenal wealth of Prospère, etc. In constructing the character of Prospère, in particular, and the young women, in general, Nyamnjoh reveals himself as an adept in psychological exploration of human characters, particularly with reference to sexual relationships. In depicting these and other characters, and making judicious use of sociological material, the author beautifully and effectively captures the psyche of city dwellers in modern materialistic times like ours when men worship in the temple of Mammon, and relationships are evaluated in terms of cash rather than love.

With regard to the artistic relevance of the lurid tales that rationalize Prospère's impressive wealth (183-190), this is what we can say: True, these rumours are not founded on facts. Of course they are only the figments of the fertile imagination of their creators. But, in our view, they constitute part of the sociological realities underpinning Prospère's story; similarly, such are the sociological realities of the text's larger social context as any Mimbolander (Cameroonian) would affirm today.

The presence of morsels of dialogues and expressions in French sprinkled all over the narrative testifies to an artistic reality occasionally noticed in Anglophone Cameroonian fiction. The fact is that, like Mbella Sonne Dipoko's *A Few Nights and Days, A Nose for Money* is dealing essentially with Francophone characters whose ideas, thoughts, feelings and emotions are rendered, almost completely, in English instead of in French by the Anglophone, but bilingual, omniscient narrator. Occasionally, however, for the sake of realistic characterization, the author is obliged to bring in bits of their utterances in the original French language.

By the same token, when, in the last chapter of the book, the story moves to West Mimboland, i.e. in the English-speaking part of the country, we have the illiterate diviner priest, Ngek, addressing his clients in an English-based pidgin language. Given the sociolinguistic realities of Mimboland (English-French bilingualism) and the author's cultural background, the interplay of English, French and Pidgin English in his narration, far from being a linguistic weakness, constitutes, for Nyamnjoh, a mark of his linguistic sensitivity and stylistic competence. All things considered, this is Nyamnjoh's best novel, and a welcome addition to Anglophone Cameroon fiction.

If the authors of the previous novels in this chapter have handled the theme of sexuality more or less generally, Eugene Kongnyuy, a knowledgeable medical doctor, in his novel with the resonant title of *The Deadly Honey* (2002)⁷, has situated sexuality squarely within the context of the realistic contemporary killer disease, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, with an obvious didactic intention. Set in Nso in the North-West Province of Cameroon, *The Deadly Honey* is the harrowing but eye-opening tale of how an ignorant but sexually active people blissfully invite disaster and death upon themselves. The 'axis of evil' involves the movement of young HIV-infected persons (mostly girls) from the city of Douala to the Nso rural community, itself immersed in sexual promiscuity. These 'young fresh' things from the city are eagerly and lustfully pounced upon by unwary village lechers; thereupon a wave of sexual scandals and abominations hits the community. Soon afterwards the libertines, one by one, become ill, manifesting various symptoms of an unknown disease; one by one they begin to die at an alarming rate. A plague of an unknown name and origin has struck the population; a curse of some sort has come upon the Nso people.

To fight the pandemic the natives turn to their tradition. They consult their *Sheys* and *Fais* and carry out acts of atonement; they perform sacrifices and rituals to their ancestors and gods; and offer gifts to alienated kindred to pacify them, all this in a bid to stem the ravages of the 'slim disease'. All the medicine men come together to unearth a buried 'evil' pot purported to have been the source of the frightful pestilence. But the net effect of these palliatives on the epidemic is nil.

In the hands of the novelist the deadly scourge becomes a device for exposing certain aspects of the Nso culture, and also for delivering a moral message to mankind, a means of revealing the best and the worst in human nature at a moment of an existential crisis. Early in the novel Rev Father Michael, in a memorable and prophetic homily, had warned his faithful that in the past God's anger against sinful mankind had come into effect through flood and slaughter; now, against the sexually promiscuous Nso people, it was likely to be effected through the 'deadly honey'. This sermon has an abiding positive effect on the young and beautiful Kila, the central female subject of the text. With the priest's powerful voice still resonant in her mind, Kila succeeds to keep away from lustful men until she duly gets married to Tumi, a businessman from Douala.

But unknown to this innocent and faithful woman, Tumi is infected with the killer disease and determined to spread it to many people before he dies. And he does so, leaving behind him, when he dies after a humiliating suffering, a long list of 75 women he has infected, top on the list being his wife now pregnant.

The best moment in the narrative is the pleasant surprise the author has reserved for the reader on the penultimate page of the novel. It is one of the rare but happy probabilities of science of great moralistic resonance and is this: the faithful, innocent and devoted Kila, despite her marriage to the infected villain, Tumi, is found, upon medical examination, to be sero negative! The message or moral of the narrative is thus clear: while the reckless are swept away by the plague, fidelity to a single spouse can be an antidote against it; however, under certain conditions infected persons like Shatou can live positively with the disease. Like in Ngoran's *Nyusham* the central theme of this novel is that the wages of sexual sin is death. AIDS is real and spreading among the sexually promiscuous like wild fire. At this rate it is likely to decimate whole communities. Thematically speaking, then, this is a novel of high social significance as its educational value is quite obvious. However, as a work of art, *The Deadly Honey* has its strengths and weaknesses.

The novel consists of 24 chapters and its broad construction issues from a beautifully conceived structural design made up of three parts. Part One focuses on the Nso rural community from which girls of relative innocence will migrate to the city in Part Two. So we can more or less call Part One that of relative innocence. Part Two focuses on the cosmopolitan city of Douala, the site of the good and the evil. Here the naïve girls from the village pick up bad city habits and get infected with HIV/AIDS. Hence we can call Part Two that of experience. On its part Part Three focuses once more on the Nso rural community now invaded, so to speak, by the infected elements from the city, with the tragic consequences that make up the high points of the narrative. And when unwary innocence encounters ruthless experience, the consequence is death; and that is what Part Three is about.

The author is patient, taking his time to develop his situation fully and realistically. The movement of Kila from the village to the city and back to the village, and the temptations and problems she faces and overcomes are realistically and memorably done. The same is true for the depiction of the infected girls from Douala, who are sexually 'devoured' by careless lechers in the village. The ensuing sexual scandals and the subsequent effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on both the girls and the men, the almost endless visits of sufferers from the city to the village and back again, in search of adequate treatment; the psychological, religious, and cultural impact of this on a whole community caught up in a mass hysteria – all of this is dramatically evoked with great resonance. The evocation of the existential condition is reminiscent of that of the city of Oran under the virulent grip of the plague in Albert Camus' *La Peste* (1947). The novelist depicts the

human condition and predicament with a sense of the dramatic and the tragic, tinged, occasionally, with the comic, bawdy touch of Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*. Above all, there is a judicious use of sociological material to evoke the appropriate local colour.

However, the Achilles' heel of the author is his occasional approximate use of language and the tendency towards bombast. One has the impression that the author is constantly consulting a thesaurus to impress the reader with sonorous Latinate words, rendering his prose, in places, stiff and pompous. We will quote only two examples of the omniscient narrator's resort to verbosity:

The mellifluous conversation flew and just when they were at their glib discussion that coincided with the acme of hatred and phobia against all strangers, there was a knock at the door (15). ...

When their teacher had used that word for the first time, the class unexpectedly went into prolonged, side-splitting laughter and superfluous pell-mell that the teacher got somberly ill-humoured and left the class morosely (23).

The educational value of this novel is highlighted by John Bimela Tume when, in the preface to the first edition, he affirms that 'The various Ministries of education and health will not hesitate to recommend this text for the school curricula, especially the G.C.E, as it carries within itself a moral' (iv). Indeed, *The Deadly Honey* is a work which, when well-edited, can be even more impressive than some other Anglophone novels. However, as it stands, it is marred by many linguistic gremlins that need to be expunged before it is fit for consumption by secondary school students, its targeted readership. Otherwise while the text sets out with the laudable, didactic intention of eliminating the AIDS virus, it may, paradoxically, implant a different germ in students, i.e. the linguistic virus that language and literature teachers would like to discourage in young learners of English: their penchant for bombast, a tendency towards linguistic inflation and grammatical impropriety.

Notes

1. Mbella Sonne Dipoko. *A Few Nights and Days*. London: Heinemann, 1970. All further page references are to this edition.
2. Mbella Sonne Dipoko. *Because of Women*. London: Heinemann, 1970. All further page references are to this edition.

3. Ngoran C. Tardzenyuy. *Nyinysham*. Bamenda: Patron Publishing House, 2002b. All further page references are to this edition.
4. Ngoran C. Tardzenyuy. *Victims of Circumstances*. Bamenda: Patron Publishing House, 2002a. All further page references are to this edition.
5. Langa Kizito. *Esther*. Bamenda: Patron Publishing House, 1993. All further page references are to this edition.
6. Francis B. Nyamnjoh. *A Nose for Money*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd, 2006. All further page references are to this edition.
7. Eugene J. Kongyuy. *The Deadly Honey*. Yaoundé: AMA-CENC, 2002. All further page references are to this edition.

Chapter Six

Opposing Visions of Feminism

A literary fact about Cameroonian imaginative writing of English expression is that it is generally phallic. For instance, a feminist reading of the Anglophone Cameroonian novels will reveal that nearly all of them, by male writers, embody embedded biases that betray their social determination in patriarchy. It is in the context of this patriarchal landscape that we must situate the historical relevance of Margaret Afuh's *Born Before Her Time* (2003) and *Flowers in the Desert* (2005), on the one hand, and Alobwed'Epie's *The Death Certificate* (2004) and *The Lady with a Beard* (2005), on the other. The view espoused in this chapter is that while Afuh's texts deconstruct gender hierarchy in favour of gender equality, Alobwed' Epie's are misogynistic texts which, while they purportedly valorize the woman, ultimately set out to reinforce and legitimise patriarchy as ideology.

According to Lizbeth Goodman, 'Feminism is a politics: a recognition of the historical and cultural subordination of women (the only world-wide majority to be treated as a minority), and the resolve to do something about it (x)'. Anyone in today's globalized world, who seriously reads Margaret Afuh's *Born Before Her Time*,¹ if he is not a rare Neanderthal man, must readily concede that feminism is an issue in the text; and that the latter, an imaginative product of a contemporary woman, has been constructed within the context of feminist awareness. There is, therefore, no doubt that Afuh must be numbered among feminist authors who, in the words of Goodman, 'have a political agenda in the writing of their work' (*Ibid*). Such cognizance demands that for a meaningful examination of Afuh's text, one needs to apply the feminist critical perspective, defined by Goodman as 'an academic approach to the study of literature which applies feminist thought to the analysis of literary texts and the contexts of their production and reception' (*Ibid*).

Set in Batibo, in Momo Division in the early 1960s, this female *bildungsroman* is the story of a brave girl, Abo, betrothed to an old man, Worewum, before she was even conceived.² When she is born, her marriage to Worewum becomes a *fait accompli*, the fulfilment of a pledge made by her father, Mbacham, in gratitude to Worewum for saving his life, during a boyhood incident, from a swarm of stinging bees. Thus at the tender age of 14, Abo is forced into the house of Worewum, a man in his early sixties. However, she successfully and courageously fights her way through obstacles, that would have daunted many, to eventually marry John, the

young man of her choice, putting forth significant defiance against an age-old practice that had dehumanized women.

Unlike her male contemporaries whose texts provide little narrative space for female subjectivity, Afuh's female protagonist is at the centre of her narrative. Indeed, from the ideological perspective, the novel she has chosen to write is quite appropriate for her intention; for the *bildungsroman*, from its German origin, means a novel of education and development of a young person, especially from adolescence to adulthood. The young person, in this case, a girl, grows up and discovers herself, her identity and conceives her mission in life and embarks upon it seriously.

Florence Stratton (1994) makes a point when she posits that a sexual allegory underlies the structure of African colonial or post-colonial societies; 'an allegory of male and female, good and evil, superiority and inferiority' (15). The closer one looks at *Born Before Her Time*, the more one notices how deeply-rooted male supremacy is, at least in Momo Division, and the more one tends to believe that Margaret Afuh falls among those feminists who undertake an imaginative critique of the 'heterosexual matrix that organizes identities and cultures in terms of opposition between man and woman' (Culler 128).

Another term for male supremacy is 'patriarchy' which, in Andrew Heywood's words is commonly used in a broader sense to mean quite simply "rule by men", both within the family and outside'. He adds that 'feminists believe that the dominance of the father within the family symbolizes male supremacy in all other institutions. Many would argue, moreover, that the patriarchal family lies at the heart of a systematic process of male domination in that it reproduces male dominance in all other walks of life' (Heywood 246).

To carry out her novelistic intention, Afuh provides her narrative with well-selected situations as well as carefully conceived characters, endowing her heroine with historical subjectivity, while showing sensitivity to her male characters. She could have adopted an antagonistic approach to character portrayal by simply standing gender hierarchy on its head, valorising her female characters while discrediting or stereotyping the male ones as, indeed, some female writers like Flora Nwapa and Grace Ogot before her have done. But this would hardly have settled the gender problem; it would merely have reversed rather than resolved it.

Afuh's approach essentially entails the juxtaposition of two broad categories of characters: the progressives or those who represent modernity versus the conservatives, defenders of tradition. The upholders of modernity are Abo and John, heroine and hero respectively, including the Rev Sisters of the Catholic Church and the younger generation; the conservatives

include the parents of the young lovers as well as the jilted Worewum and his wives. By the time the novel ends, the scale of the argument will be tipped in favour of the progressive forces who support mutual respect between man and woman. But before then, Afuh effectively demonstrates the functioning of gender hierarchy in its cruel treatment of the womenfolk (Ambanasom 'Woman Writes' 9).

In Mbacham and Ebod Api, respectively father and mother of Abo, we have sexual archetypes. Mbacham is the conventional head of the family, sure of himself and his secure position, and confident in the fact that he can never be contradicted by his wife in any decision he takes over his daughter. Ebod Api is the ideal, compliant wife, humble, subservient and obedient to her husband, maintaining a low profile whenever the men are around or engaged in important discussions: 'She feared and respected her husband and when the latter took the decision to offer their daughter to Worewum, she went along with it very happily and went on to convince her unwilling daughter' (27).

This gender hierarchy is replicated in Worewum's home where he is the undisputed lord over his five submissive wives led by Ebodnjei whose duty is to educate and tame the rebellious sixth wife to submit herself to the will and sexual desires of their husband as demanded by tradition. The gendered ideology of male domination is equally supported even by John's Christian parents who oppose his interference in Worewum's marriage to Abo. According to them, it is normal; it is the way of tradition and nothing can be done about it. Indeed, in their Christian view, John would even be committing adultery to know a woman now someone else's wife.

To subvert this formidable monster that is tradition, then, Afuh positions Abo and John, the heroine and hero, constructing the former as her female subject, while making enough room in her narrative for the central male character, John. Her female subject is very present in the narrative. We see and follow her everywhere she goes; we notice her every action and are taken into her mind.

Through these young lovers Afuh launches a scathing attack against patriarchal authority. The heartlessness of the latter is no where better illustrated than in the 'slaughtering', so to speak, of Abo on the slab of reactionary ideology of male supremacy, as she is bound, hands and feet, by her own parents and carried like a goat and dumped on Worewum's bed.

While there and still in chains and suffering from multiple wounds, Abo is effectively raped by old Worewum and left more bruised: 'Worewum watched on impatiently, with twinkling eyes as Abo was laid on his bed. When this noble job had been done, Mbacham walked out with dignity and his wife followed humbly behind, closing the door on Abo and Worewum'

(27). A 'noble job,' indeed! And when it was logically concluded, the brutal reality dawned on the victim: 'Fear gripped her heart as the truth dawned on her. She was on Worewum's bed. Yes, she could remember everything now. He had taken her by force, in fact, raped her and left her all bruised and broken'(29).

Could anything be more inhuman and degrading than this? Where is the humanity in a system that would permit parents, with easy consciences, to deliver up their own daughter for such physical and sexual violation, for unspeakable brutality in the name of male prerogatives? The objectification and commodification of the woman, in this context, becomes complete; within this particular patriarchy, Afuh is saying that women have become mere objects, commodities, to be carried and sold to the highest bidder, in this case, the rich old man.

The Anglophone Cameroonian text that Afuh appears to interrogate most is Joseph A. Ngongwikuo's *Taboo Love* (1991) whose main narrative equally involves two transgressive young lovers, Jam and Iyafi, facing an even more powerful gerontocratic patriarchy within the Mukomangoc society. The consequence of their sexual act is death, for no man can make love to a *Wintoc, the wife of His Highness, the Foyin* and go free. Prior to the dreadful fate awaiting them, Iyafi recalls similar savage treatment inflicted on girls by their parents. One memorable example is that of Nabi, virtually carried by her parents (female relations) to her husband's house. 'As she would not open her thighs the women forced them open and called on Timti [the hated husband] to jump in and consummate his marriage' (Ngongwikuo18). This and other intertextual echoes are affirmatory. They foreground women's marginal status in a male dominated society, a practice paradoxically sustained, in part, by women themselves.

When we intimate that Afuh's text deconstructs gender hierarchy, we are far from suggesting that it destroys gender hierarchy completely. Deconstruction, according to Culler, can be

simply defined as a critique of the hierarchical oppositions that have structured Western thought: inside/outside, mind/body, literal/metaphorical, speech/writing, presence/absence, nature/culture, form/meaning. To deconstruct an opposition is to show that it is not natural and inevitable but a construction, produced by discourses that rely on it, and to show that it is a construction in a work of deconstruction that seeks to dismantle it – that is, not destroy it but give it a different structure and functioning (127).

The dialogic tension within Afuh's text becomes evident in the conflicting discourses of modernity and tradition, inscribed, respectively, in the utterances of the pair of defiant, young lovers and the older generation. In matters of the heart the former fearlessly face the latter. The discourse of the young is invariably marked by rebelliousness. Abo and her mother do not see eye to eye on the question of her marrying Worewum. In her resistance Abo is frank with her mother:

'Mother, I am sorry I shan't marry this old man. You shouldn't choose a husband for me. I have to make my own choice. After-all I'm the one to marry him and live with him and ...'

'Hei! Stop that nonsense. That's why your father never wanted you to go to school. Is that what they teach you in school? To go against your parents' wish? My own father chose my husband for me and that has been the custom: that parents choose husbands for their daughters. You are not going to change the order of things,' Ebod Api fumed (21).

Such a patriarchal discourse, forcefully articulated by a woman without complexes, is emblematic of the extent to which the notion of male supremacy is embedded in the people's psyche and regarded as an absolute by the traditional society. That would explain why Ebod Api is scandalized by her daughter's daring attempt to challenge patriarchy, in the circumstances, an audacious and apparently futile act, in our view, analogous to that of a Shakespearean Hamlet contemplating taking up 'arms against a sea of troubles' (*Hamlet* III i). But the bold daughter is not browbeaten at all as she retorts in a threatening manner: 'Mother let me warn you. If you force me to marry this old man, I'll kill myself before he lays his hands on me' ... 'I will fight till the end. I must' (21, 22).

We find the same defiant mood in John's declarations when he too faces his parents, or when he is engaged in his interior monologues. In places John sounds like the legal defender of women's rights. In vain Tabita warns her son not to think of Abo any more:

'Don't go near her. You shall be responsible for what Worewum does to you. We love you. You are a good boy but you know Abo was promised to Worewum even before she was conceived.'

'That is the more reason I should stand by her. And I mean to stop such wicked customs. A girl should have the right to at least, help in choosing her husband. I am going to Abo right now. A time will come when lovers will discover each other and march hand in hand into happiness while parents watch on'(48).

When he leaves his mother, John becomes engrossed in his thoughts as he laments the fate of other girls in situations comparable to Abo's.

He thought of other thousands of Abos who had gone the same way to their slaughter house of a marriage to old and weak grandfathers while they were yet children. They were forced to carry out the enormous tasks of womanhood on the bruised shoulders of childhood.

But against his father's argument John delivers his greatest defence of the women's rights, his most impassioned oration in favour of women's concerns:

Father ... It is high time men treated women in this village like human beings ... Everyday girls and children are handed over to old men on platters as gifts or payments for one debt or the other. I could go on and on with incidents of such injustices. For God's sake, these women are your mothers and your children's mothers. They have souls and feelings equally as men. I hope a time will come when women will live hand in hand with their husbands as two complementary parts and not like master and slave. Slave, you hear that? That's what these helpless creatures have been reduced to (56, 57).

The utterance is a furious attack against patriarchy, a conservative system that exalts men and humbles women. It is a discourse that favours deconstructing gender hierarchy while valorising gender equality; for it holds women to be equal to men and not their slaves. We consider it the central pronouncement, the key ideological statement, of the text, one that embodies the author's feminist vision of life inscribed in gender equality. Here John is a feminist serving as an important mouthpiece for the author. It is symbolically significant that the progressive discourse is ascribed to a young male character with the future in his favour. For it amounts to saying that the conservative male practices of today will no longer be tolerated in the future.

As he lurks around Worewum's house in an attempt to save his love from the old man's grip, John 'longed for a time when wives will live in love and understanding with their husbands discussing their problems and sharing ideas as he read in Father's house' (73). In an introspective mood three pages previously, he had told himself that 'He would show Pa and his in-laws that times had changed with the advent of education and Christianity in the clan. It was high time they know that women had feelings and would love just as passionately as the few white couples around' (70). School and church, education and Christianity, important agents of change, are seen here as liberating forces working in favour of the young people in matters of love.

Following Abo's escape from Worewum's compound to find safety and protection with two Rev sisters in a neighbouring enemy village, controversial, collective reactions are swift and blunt. To many conservatives Abo is a bad example of a girl acting against her father's wishes. Others apportion greater blame to her father who had blundered by exposing his daughter to the corrupting influence of the heady ideas brought by the schools and the church. In contrast liberals, especially the young generation, hail Abo who has become a role model.

In the final analysis the influences of Western culture help to make it impossible for Worewum to accept Abo as a wife; 'I can't even accept her now. She is now polluted with your ideas and way of life'(137). With Worewum out of their way, it becomes clear to the young lovers that their marriage is just a matter of time. Their happy sentiments are spontaneous. John, addressing his lover, says:

... 'When we start working we shall have a grand church wedding – what do you say?'

'Wao', cried Abo. 'What do I have to say? You are my lord and master. I shall follow you anyway like a sheep'.

'No. I do not want to be your lord and master. I want an intelligent, loving wife with a mind of her own to share my life and all' (139).

In this passage while Abo surprisingly sounds conservative, as she wishes to submit herself to her husband 'like a sheep,' John, true to his progressive principles, refuses to lord it over her as the older generation are doing now. He would choose for a wife a woman more or less on an equal footing with him, a 'loving wife with a mind of her own to share my life and all.'

With the intervention of the Catholic Church to whose faith Abo has now been converted, the marriage of Abo and John is solemnized after Worewum's dowry on Abo has been refunded. After this the couple moved forward to stand before Father Peter for the exchange of the marriage vows and rings. "What God has put together, let no man put asunder" concluded Father Peter (146). Through the agency of the young lovers, the novelist thus undertakes to dismantle the hegemony of patriarchy, reinscribing it in equality between men and women.

Afuh's novel opens *in medias res*, with Abo already in chains in Worewum's house, a device of technique wherein a narrative begins with a crucial event instead of the first chronological episode of the story. Even though the narrative perspective of the text is that of the omniscient narrator, much of the story is focalized from the consciousness of the heroine, especially through the effective use of the flashback technique, some of which occurs while she is in solitary confinement from which she is planning an escape.

The subject of the text is woman in a conservative society. As exemplified by the heroine, woman here is so cruelly treated that her language is coloured by her bitter negative experience. In the circumstances she is understandably emotional and subjective, revealing her critical and defiant attitude towards the conservative elders as well as foregrounding the theme of inhumane patriarchy.

Afuh's sensitivity, sympathy and objectivity are seen in the way she constructs not only the female characters but the male ones as well, especially John, to match her female subject. In a sense it could be argued that the text is a twin *bildungsroman*, for while it is the story of the education, growth and development of young Abo, it is equally that of the teenage John, thus the narrative of two young people who fall in love and come to discover their mutual historical mission: that of breaking with the traditional past, of carrying out an onslaught against a monstrous tradition long sustained by a callous patriarchy. The evocation of the powerful love between the young people as well as their strong sentiments against the gendered ideology is very realistic.

As she does with Abo, the author makes us follow John and listen to his declaration to Abo, his arguments with his parents, and his conversation with Abo's mother. Above all, she takes us into his mind to follow the trend of his thoughts as he lurks around Worewum's compound at night in his attempt to rescue his 'imprisoned' lover. In John Afuh has constructed a realistic likeable character, likely to be a role model to her male readership, while Abo will similarly appeal to many an adolescent girl.

Though the thesis defended in this chapter is one that places more emphasis on the ideological than on the aesthetic dimension of *Born Before Her Time*, we consider it appropriate, before we conclude the discussion, to briefly comment here on Margaret Afuh's condition of coloniality, an interesting phenomenon evident in her text. She is a post-colonial subject whose text is written in an imperial language, English. But the intimate and immediate circumstances of her life that constitute the subject matter of her work are Cameroonian (African), a reality bespeaking her hybridity. A hybrid subject emerging from a situation of a superimposition of a conflicting European language and culture upon hers, Afuh is thus a child of two worlds: the one by virtue of her British colonial educational upbringing, the other by her close attachment to her Moghamo tradition. Her text therefore appropriately celebrates diversity, difference and hybridity.

From a purely linguistic perspective, Afuh's rural Moghamo characters in normal circumstances should actually be speaking Moghamo, a language the author herself speaks but does not write. As she is capable of writing but in English, her rural characters are made to speak in English, but an

English refashioned to reflect the thoughts, speech patterns, rhythms and idioms of Moghamo native speakers.

Any informed student of literature in English reading Afuh's text will instantly recognize it for what it is: a post-colonial text belonging not to English literature but to literatures in English, and one in which, to go by the flavour of their language, the characters (Cameroonians) are speaking, living, and interacting with one another in a unique provincial setting. For instance, this is how part of a discussion based on the attempt to persuade the jilted Worewum to take back his dowry on Abo, is conducted:

'You forget that she is my wife even now?'
'Be prepared to have your bride price back.'
'Fongang Abo-Atuh?' shouted Tangang, jumping to his feet and addressing each elder by his title.
'O – e,' the others responded
'Ekwabi.'
'O – e!'
'Ikwapugho...!'
'O – e!'
'Afuka ...!'
'O – e!' (129).

Here we have a practice, common in African oral literature, wherein elders are addressed, in some traditional societies, not directly by their names but by their titles, involving a lively exchange between an oral performer and the audience. As for the term 'bride price', it is the African rendition of the English concept of 'dowry'; 'bride price' will strike a native speaker of English as a bit odd even if he or she understands what it means in the African (Cameroonian) context.

Afuh's characters use proverbs that, although phrased in English, embody metaphors and images drawn from an African rural environment and experience: 'She is a rotten palmtree indeed. Both the pulp and the kernel are bad' (82); 'Mbacham was blowing fire with water in his mouth' (91); and 'Our people say a toad does not hop about at noon for nothing' (140).

As the villagers celebrate Abo and John's wedding, they are served food items from their rural setting: 'Outside, the local guests were served with beans, and plantains ... cocoyams and vegetables. The food was pushed down their throats by cups and cups of raffia palm wine'(146).

The celebration of the wedding of the young people marks a romantic high point in their lives, and emblemizes the triumph of hybridity over 'purity', for Abo and John are post-colonial subjects who, because they

have been influenced by the ideas and values brought by the schools and the church, can no longer lead the kind of traditional life known to their parents. By the same token, however, Western influences do not automatically transform them into Europeans, either, to abandon their culture completely. They combine more or less the values of both spaces, the imperial space and the indigenous space, creating a 'third' hybrid space, neither purely one nor the other, but a bit of both. The consummation of their relationship begins with a traditional betrothal and wedding (140-142), before culminating in the 'grand church wedding' (143-146).

After everything, then, *Born Before Her Time* thematizes the cruelty of patriarchy or male chauvinism which victimizes Abo, the female subject, whose feminist ideas are ahead of her time, hence the text's title. She asserts her individuality as she takes upon herself to challenge an age-old, conservative tradition. Her unequivocal feminist stance amounts to a counter discourse, confronting the prevailing discursive patriarchal practice. As already intimated, feminism thus becomes a central issue in the novel. However, placed within the spectrum of feminist views, Afuh the novelist would emerge as neither a conservative nor a radical but a moderate. Indeed, her moderate feminism comes close to womanism, a brand of black feminism. According to C.O. Ogunyemi 'Womanism is black centred; it is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism; unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand' (65).

In Abo and John, Afuh has constructed an archetypal couple with mutual respect. Theirs is an example of a modern marriage to be copied by others; they represent a pair that will henceforth serve as a model for young people who have already seen in Abo a 'heroine who was contributing greatly to the advent of the age of enlightenment in their clan' (131). From their successful wedding, her text accentuates not a vertical but a horizontal relationship. It highlights an egalitarian union between a man and a woman, upholding, thus, gender equality.

Like many artistic works, Afuh's text betrays a few flaws. These include authorial intrusion 'This was the cross that our young Spartan had to bear to achieve her freedom.' (68), the mixing of idioms 'housewives' tales' (99) for 'old wives' tales', a local, rural illiterate character quoting or making reference to the title of Shakespeare's work 'all is well that ends well' (130), and a couple of orthographical errors. On the whole, however, *Born Before Her Time* is more than redeemed by the author's artistic strengths seen in her deployment of effective techniques, including the apt use of pathetic fallacy (96 and 143) as well as having at her disposal a feminist ideological

perspective that allows her adequate perception of her issues and the deep penetration of the realities of her characters. Besides, in patterning her work, Afuh, according to N. Patrick Tata, 'has consciously, systematically and successfully achieved structural symmetry for our edification' ('As Leaves Grow' 65). A lone feminist voice in the Anglophone Cameroonian patriarchal wilderness with reference to prose fiction, *Born Before Her Time*, in this regard, assumes a paradigmatic status as it foregrounds an issue that resonates with contemporary feminists in Cameroon in particular and Africa and the world in general.

Flowers in the Desert (2005)³ is the sequel to *Born Before Her Time*, a text whose heroine and hero, as we have seen, are respectively Abo and John, both of whom, in the sequel, are now old and parents of the hero, Rudolf. There is a big time gap between the two texts. If *Born Before Her Time* is set in a rural, traditional community in the early 1960s, *Flowers in the Desert* is set in an urban, sophisticated milieu in the early years of the 21st century, a period that presents many problems and social challenges to young, educated people. These social problems include joblessness, uncertain employment, or redundancies and HIV/AIDS. Against this raspy background of social anomie and uncertainty about the future, Afuh constructs young people trapped within the hybrid, third space. Some of them seriously contemplate cultural migration to the imperial space of the West as their sole means of survival in a world that does not cater for their socio-economic needs (155).

Afuh's novel thematizes these problematic figures of the third space, the hybrid subjects caught within the in-betweenness that materialises between the first imperial space and the colonized narrative of the indigenous site. In other words, hemmed in within these two hegemonies, the hybrid subjects of Rudolf and Wendy, Brenda and Joseph, Clara and Joshua, and Nick and Sophia do not belong exclusively to any, but rather to both in a way that makes them less pure than those original occupants of the grand narrative of the imperial West, on the one hand, or the grand indigenous narrative of the village, on the other.

Against this harsh social background Afuh depicts a fresh breath of true and successful love, exemplified by the pairs of young lovers already mentioned. If in *Born Before Her Time* the hegemony of patriarchy is a central concern, in *Flowers in the Desert* it is not an issue; this is understandable, for by the end of the earlier text gender hierarchy had been deconstructed in favour of gender equality. It is this gender equality that is evident in the romantic relationships between the four pairs of young lovers depicted in the second text. True, patriarchy is not completely dismantled, but it is not strong enough to constitute a serious problem to the young educated people

now. Therefore, gender hierarchy that is skewed in favour of the men is not the discursive practice in *Flowers in the Desert*. In this thematic progression Afuh thus demonstrates her consistent, realistic development as an artist.

Through the agency of the pairs of young lovers caught up in the whirling vortex of emotion and contemporary problems, she artistically articulates a powerful Christian message and it is this, that for all the social anomie of the problematic third space, those hybrid subjects who are faithful in their relationships, those who fear God and genuinely espouse Christian values, will eventually triumph in life with the help of God.

Another area of progress in Margaret Afuh's art is in her mastery of language. If in the second novel her narrative lacks the sustained thematic concentration of the earlier novel, her English is now more natural and spontaneous, more idiomatic and colloquial. In other words the defining traits of her language now are maturity and poise. Nevertheless, linguistic shortcomings there are in the second text, but these are the results of the editor being caught nodding off when he should have been more alert and vigilant.

Courtship in the second text is conducted in a sophisticated idiom, marked by the pervasive influence of Western values. The most sustained love relationship in the novel is that of Rudolf and Wendy. The latter is a girl from the coastal area while Rudolf comes from Batibo in the Northwest. The couple moves from the city to the village and back again; they visit their parents and encounter no serious objection to their love except minor resistance from Rudolf's auntie, Anoh, who fears that a 'foreign' girl like Wendy may be barren, a baseless suspicion as Wendy soon becomes pregnant, to the joy of all their relatives. The parents of the young lovers cooperate to see the young people succeed in their relationship. Wendy's mother plays a key role in persuading her daughter to accept Rudolf's plan of going to the U.S. for their own good. The most God-fearing couple in the text who have a Christian impact on the other young people are Brenda and Joseph who are born again Christians. But through the couple, Clara and Joshua, the novelist makes it clear that repented sinners can still lead a successful life. Clara and Joshua are living positively with HIV/AIDS and they are God's children who have turned over a new leaf in their lives.

In the final analysis, in the exploration of the theme of gender equality, Margaret Afuh evinces a positive attitude towards her young male and female characters, the central subjects in her texts; in contrast Alobwed' Epie adopts a critical stand against what some will call extreme feminists. Alobwed' Epie is intrigued by women who exaggerate the rights of the woman; he is fascinated with 'male-women' who fight patriarchy by standing it more or less on its head, and by so doing, they transgress the norms of

sexual codes. This is seen in the two central female characters in his two novels *The Death Certificate* (2004)⁴ and *The Lady with a Beard* (2005). The 'male-women' respectively are Jacqueline Diwona and Emade.

Jacqueline Diwona is the wife of the Minister of Territorial Administration and the sister of Mongo Meka, the richest and most powerful man in Ewawa. When Mongo Meka is reported to have died in a road accident, Jacqueline finds herself the sole heir of her brother's fabulous wealth acquired from denuding the country's Central Bank and the General Treasury. Very bossy and domineering, she sets out like a man, or even more than a man, to ensure that the late brother is given a befitting, prestigious burial. She undertakes the expensive surgical restoration of her brother's damaged face in Paris (83-84).

According to the rules of Ebony Society, the sect to which Meka belonged, there has to be a rite of cessation of marriage performed on the widow of a lost member. This sexual ritual is accomplished by the nearest male to the deceased, in this case, the Minister of Finance, the eldest and nearest male relative to Meka. But Jacqueline will not tolerate this. She subverts this patriarchal practice when she takes upon herself to 'mount' the widow of her late brother, Antoinnette Yvonne, a white woman. This rite takes place near the altar within the temple of the sect. Thus, instead of the normal situation of a man mounting a woman, Jacqueline makes love to another woman. 'So Jacqueline sent out the members from the place and did the act. After that Yvonne came out crying' (147). Jacqueline therefore transgresses the norms of sexual codes, deconstructing the prevailing gender hierarchy.

In several places in the text she is referred to as a man, or she carries out certain tasks usually accomplished only by men. According to Marie-Claire, Jacqueline Diwona is 'the male-lady, the male-daughter of late papa Meka, sole heir of the late Treasurer General, Mongo Meka' (182). This double designation means that she is a lady or a daughter who behaves more like a man, an iron lady of sorts. In the relationship with her husband, it is Jacqueline who commands, and the husband obeys. 'When Jacqueline coughs, he spits out the phlegm. She is the husband and he the wife' (148). Here Jacqueline has turned the gender hierarchy on its head. Empowered politically and financially, Jacqueline is intoxicated with power as she usurps more power.

To ensure that her brother's wealth is not inherited by the white widow, Jacqueline subjects her to humiliating treatment and punishing rites of widowhood. Eventually Jacqueline succeeds in hustling Antoinnette Yvonne to marry someone else. Conversely, in order for Meka's wealth to remain in the family, Jacqueline transforms Marie-Claire, a house maid in Meka's house, into a lover and then a wife:

She said she wanted me to share the same room with her – her late brother's room' (179)... Our intimacy grew by leaps and bounds. Then one day Madam called me and asked me whether I loved her as much as she loved me. I said I did. She asked me whether I could leave all I had and follow her. I said I could. Then she asked me how bride-price was paid in my tribe and village. I told her. A few days after that, she gave me a large amount of money and said I should go and give my parents. The money was too much to be considered bride price (183).

The intimacy between the 'male lady' and Marie-Claire was the former's strategy to eventually get the latter drugged so as to facilitate her impregnation by a hired man, 'Kick'. The child from Marie-Claire's pregnancy is Framki, a boy supposed to be the male heir to Mongo Meka. But during her pregnancy an anaemic Marie-Claire is rendered healthier, thanks to blood donated by Jacqueline. The pregnant woman and her child are, therefore, carrying Jacqueline's blood, a symbolic kind of impregnation by the 'male-lady.'

Going back to Mongo Meka's death, it turns out that his had been a faked death. Eventually Antoinnette Yvonne gets married to a French man, provoking the 'dead' Meka to make a ghostly reappearance in order to frustrate the wedding which will mean financial ruin for him since most of his stolen billions are in Antoinnette Yvonne's account in France. However, this is too late; Meka has been hoisted by his own petard: the 'death certificate' earlier established to authenticate his 'death'. Meka fails to access the billions saved in his ex-wife's account and equally loses the case against her in France to his great frustration and that of Jacqueline. And it is a twist of bitter irony that these brother and sister who once bestrode the Ewawan globe like colossi are so materially devastated that they die disgracefully, through suicide, an abomination. But the more interesting male-lady whom Albowed'Epie very carefully constructs before cutting her down to size is Emade, the central female subject of *The Lady with a Beard* (2005)⁵.

Set in the mid 1950s within the Bakossi cultural heartland in the South-West Province, *The Lady with a Beard* is the intriguing story of Emade, the initially extraordinary and charismatic female character from whose name the novel derives its title. A widow for long at loggerheads with the men of her village because she has refused to 'become an elephant killed at the cross-roads' (116), Emade is, as a result, derogatorily nicknamed, 'The Lady with a Beard', an epithet that incidentally fits her temperament and which she accepts with equanimity (Ambanasom Review *Lady* 8).

At the centre of Alobwed'Epie's narrative, Emade is endowed with full subjectivity as well as an arrogant and contemptuous discourse, particularly towards the men and inferior Others. Hers is a counter discourse confronting the hegemony of patriarchy. She defies the men and women of Atieg and Muabag. In many ways she comports herself like a 'male woman' as she accomplishes several manly tasks even better than the men themselves. Through various rituals related to marriage, birth and death, involving song, recitation, invocation, narration and, above all, drum communication, Emade proves herself an adept of her culture. However, her expert oral performances and other feats, that invariably put her on a collision course with the men whose prerogatives she arrogates to herself, are controversial, giving rise to rather mixed reactions: admiration as well as criticism.⁶

The Lady with a beard holds men in very great contempt and debunks time-honoured ideas of male chauvinism. She subverts the prevailing gender hierarchy, standing it more or less on its head; she thus reverses the familiar gender allegory of man/woman, into woman/man, thus "holding the world by the neck" (117). In her feminist challenge of patriarchal authority, Emade stands virtually alone in the whole of Mbuogmut Clan; even her dearest sister, Ahone, is opposed to Emade's extremist feminism that threatens to undo her.

Paradoxically, Emade's intimate attachment to her culture, in a way, becomes her bane; for it is her strong belief in superstition, as she seeks the help of diviner priests and 'protection' for herself and her lone daughter, Ntube, that proves, in the end, that Emade is only an ordinary woman, after all. Confronted with traditional situations that seriously threaten her life and that of her beloved child, Emade behaves in a way that shows she is, after everything, only a timorous and fearful mother seeking protection like any other human being; she thus acts in a manner that betrays her as 'a cockroach with a mane seeking refuge elsewhere' (104).

Therefore, in Emade Alobwed'Epie first builds up an admirable female character and then cuts her down to size; he constructs a heroine who deconstructs patriarchy, only to be deflated herself at the end of the novel. His text purportedly sets out to foreground the woman. It initially valorises her but then discredits her at the end; it places her on the pedestal but then pulls the rug from under her feet, indicating the failure of a woman who once posed as a 'malewoman'. Towards the end of the novel, Emade discovers to her chagrin that even in the domain of divination, certain powers and abilities are available only to priests and not to priestesses. Very much against her wish and when she cannot undo what has been done, it dawns on Emade that her puzzle has been solved by a mere male, palm-wine tapper as 'she moved away in humiliation'(117). Ultimately,

then, the author thematizes the limitation of the woman despite her occasional knack for rising to certain occasions.

In this regard it would be hard to completely refute the essentially feminist charge that the novel indicates its author's intention to spite the woman and advocates of gender politics who support the rights of the woman. In other words, *The Lady with a Beard* amounts to an imaginative critique of one kind of feminism. One can then affirm, in the light of this insight, that the text's title has a cynical ring to it.

The whole novel is constructed around a few key incidents, particularly those related to Ntube's misfortunes and Mechane's illness, death and the celebration of death that follows thereafter. As these and other incidents are fully developed, Emade's fame steadily rises, reaching the climax at the end of the 'closing door' ceremony marking the demise of Mechane. But when she returns to Atieg, Emade's reputation begins to decline until, by the end of the text, she is reduced, in relative terms, to almost a despicable woman.

In depicting his Mbuogmut characters in situations, in action and living reaction to the pressure of events, Alobwed'Epie takes a satirical look at the antics of the group, mercilessly exposing eternal human foibles like meanness, selfishness, fawning and hypocrisy. In doing so, however, he has immortalized the culture of his people; for the projection of the rich oral tradition of the Bakossi people must be recognized as one of the major themes emerging from the novel.

The narrative texture of the text reveals a creative imagination that draws on a rich African (Cameroonian) oral tradition (proverbs, praise-names, song, invocation, recitation, ululation, narration, and, above all, drum communication). There is a judicious deployment of sociological material to serve as realistic background to the story, particularly to define character. The use of proverbs in this text will make even Chinua Achebe turn green with envy. The novel is a veritable treasure house of Bakossi proverbs. It contains at least 70 proverbs, the most rhetorically and thematically significant of which is 'A woman's urine does not cross a beam' (36, 66, 100, 104 etc).

There is, some would say, a surfeit of proverbs, and this, incidentally, constitutes the text's structural weakness. Sometimes the proverbs come in rapid succession, leaving the uninitiated little or no time for the digestion of each before the next. The overall effect is the slowing down of one's reading speed or, alternatively, reading without adequate comprehension. This, however, is a negligible flaw compared to the author's artistic strengths revealed in his competent handling of plot, characterization, language, point of view and overall structure.

In comparison with *The Death Certificate*, *The Lady with a Beard*, on the face of it, is a slight work and, some would say, a retrogressive one, in view of the impressive and progressive dimension of the previous novel. The more crucial economic and political aspects of *The Death Certificate* are treated in Chapter Seven of this work. Suffice it to state here that *The Lady with a Beard*, with a bias for cultural documentation, is a different kind of book from the earlier substantial novel; in its own category it is an interesting text and one that explores issues of social relevance. One need not judge it solely on the criterion of radical commitment with reference to contemporary socio-political issues, by which we mean the 'politician's politics'. In a way the new text is not devoid of politics, although its own kind of politics is gender politics. Flowing from the pen of the same author, however, both novels point to the realistic direction of the growth of the Anglophone Cameroon literature: towards a comprehensive social vision and not a limited perspective issuing from a homogeneous mould.

The Lady with a Beard portrays another side of the author, underscoring how it is sometimes risky to pass a definitive judgement on an artist based on a single imaginative work. If, ideologically speaking, Alobwed'Epie's previous novel projects visionary radicalism, the present one evinces liberal humanism, both of which tendencies, in our humble opinion, should be accommodated within our imaginative writing that cannot be confined to a monolithic matrix of values.

Notes

1. Margaret Afuh. *Born Before Her Time*. Bamenda: Patron Publishing House, 2003. Page references to this text are taken from this edition.
2. For material on Margaret Afuh in this chapter the present writer draws freely from his article 'Deconstructing Gender Hierarchy: A Study of Margaret Afuh's *Born Before Her Time* (2003)', published in Paul Mbangwana, Kizitus Mpoche and Tenu Mbu, eds. *Language, Literature and Identity*. Gottingen: Cuvillier Verlag, 2006. 264 – 270.
3. Margaret Afuh. *Flowers in the Desert*. Bamenda: Patron Publishing House, 2005. Page references to this novel are taken from this edition.
4. Alobwed'Epie. *The Death Certificate* Yaoundé: Editions CLE, 2004. Page references to this book are taken from this edition.
5. Alobwed'Epie. *The Lady With a Beard*. Yaoundé: Editions CLE, 2005. Page references to this text are taken from this edition.
6. For material on this novel in this chapter the present writer draws freely from his review of *The Lady With a Beard* in *The Post* of Monday, October 10, 2005 p.8.

Chapter Seven

Alternative Ideological Visions

The Cameroonian creative writers of English expression have adopted an imperial language, English, and the novelistic art form to serve the Cameroonian vision. As we have seen in the previous chapters, through their works, these writers are exploring, dramatizing and exposing the mores, and critiquing the social ills that plague the Cameroonian/African society. The world of these novels is an imagined real world, peopled with characters who criss-cross one another's path, full-blooded characters caught up in the complex web of their quotidian existence, involving their dilemmas, hopes and frustrations. Through their utterances, thoughts and feelings, these characters express themselves, and in the process, reveal their outlook. They articulate their views about certain issues or individuals in their communities or their world. In handling their subject matter the Anglophone Cameroonian novelists, in general, and those treated in this section, in particular, artistically, guide and shape our attitudes towards their virtual characters, subtly persuading us to adopt the writers' point of view or ideological stand. In other words, Tah Asongwed, Francis Nyamnjoh, John N. Nkengasong and Alobwed'Epie, the novelists under discussion in this chapter, imaginatively explore counter ideologies to subvert the prevailing hegemonies for possible alternative dispensations and for a meaningful social deconstruction of Cameroon. To properly develop this chapter, it is important for us to first attempt to grasp the meaning of the Marxist concept known as 'ideology'.

The well-known Marxist model of society consists of the economic base and the superstructure. The base is made up of the material means of production, distribution and exchange, while the superstructure is the 'cultural world of ideas, art, religion, law and so on' (Barry 158). According to Marxist scholars, the elements of the superstructure are not 'innocent' but invariably shaped or determined by the economic base. In the domain of Marxist criticism, as we stated in Chapter Two, there is nothing like an original Marxist aesthetics for the simple reason that beyond their scattered comments on art and literature, the founders of Marxism, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, never evolved any sustained theory of art and literature. The narrative of Marxist aesthetics today is but an attempt by later scholars to apply Marxist ideas to art and literature, one of which is 'ideology'.

Coined by a French man Antoine Destutt de Tracy in 1796, the term 'idéologie' (ideology) was fated to develop fully in the hands of Marxists

like Karl Marx, Lenin, Antonio Gramsci and others, hence its centrality in Marxist Criticism today. A slippery term that does not have a single accepted definition but rather rival definitions, 'ideology' is considered by David McLellan to be 'the most elusive concept in the whole of the social sciences' (qtd. in Heywood 5). The impossibility of an easy definition thus indicated, the definition chosen for our purpose is the one proposed by Andrew Heywood:

Ideology is a more or less coherent set of ideas that provides the basis for organized political action whether this is intended to preserve, modify or overthrow the existing system of power. All ideologies therefore (a) offer an account of the existing order, usually in the form of a 'world-view' (b) advance a model of desired future, a vision of the 'good society,' and (c) explain how political change can and should be brought about – how to get from (a) to (b). (12)

A weapon sometimes used by people to criticize or condemn those with a rival set of ideas or beliefs, ideology possesses an emotional and affective character since it is a means of expressing people's hopes and fears as well as their aspirations and sympathies. The objective world is out there, but the way we see or interpret it is due to our ideology; for, according to Heywood, we 'look at the world through a veil of theories, presuppositions and assumptions that shape what we see and thereby impose meaning on the world' (13). And when we sometimes accuse others of being 'ideological' even when we are guilty of the very sin, adds Heywood, it is because in making us see the world through a 'veil' of assumptions, ideology is 'effectively invisible'.

On his part Terry Eagleton says that when, for instance, radical critics who espouse a set of 'social priorities' with which many people do not agree are often rejected as 'ideological', this is because 'ideology is always a way of describing other people's interests rather than one's own' (*Literary Theory* 211). Elsewhere Eagleton stresses that

ideology is not in the first place a set of doctrines; it signifies the way men live out their roles in class-society, the values, ideas and images which tie them to their social functions and so prevent them from a true knowledge of society as a whole ... the imaginary ways in which men experience the real world (*Marxism and Literary Criticism* 16-18)

In the preface to the latter work, Eagleton affirms that literature is a vector of ideology when he says 'ideologies [are] the ideas, values and feelings by which men experience their societies at various times. And certain of those ideas, values and feelings are available to us only in literature' (*Marxism and Literary Criticism* preface).

The link between literature and ideology, though subtle, is one that we must try to grasp. On the one hand 'vulgar' Marxists generally hold that literature is nothing but ideology in different form, that literary works are the expressions of the dominant ideologies of their time. But other Marxists counter this claim by asserting that a great deal of literature challenges the ideology it confronts. However, as one of the forms of social consciousness within the superstructure, literature has a unique relationship with ideology (Ngara, *Art and Ideology* 21). According to Engels as quoted by Eagleton 'art is far richer and more "opaque" than political and economic theory because it is less purely ideological' (*Marxism and Literary Criticism* 16).

The fact is that the basic material that the literary artist works with is essentially ideological. But in creatively working on it, he gives the ideology a definite shape and form in a way peculiar to literary art. The finished fictional product, as art, distances itself from the ideology that gave it birth (*Marxism and Literary Criticism* 19). What such a creative work makes us 'see', 'perceive' or 'feel' (in imaginary ways) is the ideology of the world from which it springs. Yet, the work can also transform that ideology when it interrogates, when it challenges it. Therefore, from an ideological conception of a world, a creative work is born, but which work, depending on the class or social group origin of the artist, can react back upon and affect that ideology by proposing a counter or an alternative ideology. However, in some cases, the artistic creation can be homologous with the dominant ideology of an epoch.

If literature is a vector of ideology, that ideology is inscribed in a text's matter and manner, in the themes and forms that make up a literary work, for the 'true bearers of ideology in art are the very forms rather than abstractable content of the work itself' (*Marxism and Literary Criticism* 24). And to this Eagleton adds that in choosing a form, 'the writer finds his choice already ideologically circumscribed. He may combine and transmute forms available to him from a literary tradition, but these forms themselves, as well as his permutations of them are ideologically significant' (*Marxism and Literary Criticism* 26).

Our discussion thus leads us to one conclusion, and it is this, that to be able to bring out the ideology of a literary text, one would do well to examine not only its themes and pre-occupations but its formal aspects as well. That is to say, in the spirit of authentic Marxist aesthetics, one should

examine the dialectical relationship between content and form and how these are rooted in the social and general history of the epoch.

***Born to Rule* (1993)**

***Autobiography of a Life President* by Tah Asongwed**

The sub-title of this work – *Autobiography of a Life President* – suggests that it is the story of an actual person written by himself. The reader therefore automatically and mentally places the text within the rubric of actuality. However, this impression is quickly dispelled as soon as he reads, on the page following the title-page, the following disclaimer by Tah Asongwed: ‘The names, characters, places and incidents in this book are either the product of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Accordingly any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or locales is entirely one of incredible coincidence.’

The conclusion the reader then draws is that the book is a fictional autobiography, and that the putative author and life President, Wan Nei, is purely the creation of Tah Asongwed’s imagination. This follows suit for the purported author of the foreword, or, for that matter, any other character in the text. This preliminary clarification is essential in that we can then situate the work squarely in the context of imaginative literature – fictional autobiography, a genre with an honourable pedigree in Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), purportedly written by Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon and then a Captain of several ships (Abrams 906). So, through Wan Nei, we find Tah Asongwed role-playing or simulating real-life situations; and given his incredible achievement in the text, this is a feat that is not given to just any writer.

That said, *Born to Rule* (1993)¹ is set in a fictional African country, Mandzah, and the self-narration of an African President – Monarch, Wan Nei. In it he tells us how he rose from a humble beginning to be a life president. A bastard who does not even know his own mother, Wan Nei is brought up by white European missionaries in colonial Mandzah. After a secondary school education, Nei decides to join the trade unionism advocating improved economic conditions for the native Mandzah workers, a movement whose needs will eventually end in the demands for political independence,

However, unlike the radical anti-white natives clamouring for political independence, Nei finds himself among the moderates, i.e. the pro-white indigenes who feel they are not yet mature for political independence. Nei’s moderate faction of native workers is understandably privileged by the white colonialists who begin to lure Nei with gifts and money, grooming him for a future leadership role in the country. They bring tremendous

pressure to bear on him; white missionaries are sent to bribe him with a great deal of money to help in his political campaigns. With the white establishment – the missionaries and the colonial administration-on his side, Wan Nei easily becomes the President of a newly independent Mandzah, this after the radical opposition has been put in disarray and its leadership decapitated, more or less, thanks to the efforts of Rev Grimm.

With their man in power, the white establishment and the West in general take virtual control of the economy of Mandzah. Nei surrounds himself with his family, friends and relatives. Appointment to key political positions is done along tribal lines; in some cases, Nei plays off leaders of one tribe against the other. After literally mortgaging the country to foreign powers, he and his cronies concentrate the wealth of the nation in their hands. Indeed, Nei stashes away his loot in his 'personal national bank account' abroad (147). His administration is characterized by dictatorship, intolerance, ruthlessness, kleptocracy, mendacity, squandermania and megalomania. Nei has made his country 'self-sufficient' in cheap, imported, call it, discarded, rice, from the West. In this and other ways Western countries get wealthier at the expense of Mandzah at the receiving end of unwanted Western products.

The central theme emerging from the text is the narrative of underdevelopment of Africa through autocratic rule. Wan Nei emblemizes those African dictators who, with the connivance of the West, have installed themselves in power. Cocooned by their cronies, families and friends, and solidly supported by Western, bloated capitalists, they have virtually ruined their countries economically for their own selfish aims and those of their foreign masters. Like in Alobwed' Epie's *The Death Certificate*, we are talking here of organized plunder. This then is the grand, immoral theme whence many subsidiary negative ones emerge.

The burden of taxation, for example, is borne by the poor and unprotected masses – those least able to pay; in contrast, the rich and the powerful, those most capable of paying taxes, are exonerated. Wan Nei the head of state has no qualms declaring that 'The big guns are not paying the state a farthing ... The result is that taxes are paid by the wretched of our earth who do not have the money to pay' (153). No vice is beyond Wan Nei. Beginning with his family, then his relatives and ministers, unsavoury practices like nepotism, tribalism, favouritism and corruption are cultivated; these vices then spread out, like a cancer out of control, and overrun the country.

A bastard and a man who has grown from rags to riches and power, Wan Nei is a character who can be better understood thanks to the insights of that branch of psychology founded by Alfred Adler (1870-1973). The latter

holds that the search for power, and not sexual drives, is the single important factor that determines how an individual thinks, feels or behaves (Rosner 135). Wan Nei is thus ruled over by one dominant passion: the crave for power and dominance over people. Besides, as an obscure bastard, Nei carries within him an emotional hurt or injury. According to Adler a man like Wan Nei, because of his unenviable family background, harbours feelings of inferiority. But 'out of these feelings comes the need to feel superior to those around' him (Rosner 135). Thus Nei is driven by the desire to prove to those around him that, for all his disgraceful social origin, he is indeed, somebody; he is, therefore, propelled to excel in the political arena to compensate for his emotional hurt and social handicap; he is psychologically pushed to excel in politics to prove, at least to himself, that he is actually superior to those who surround him. Nei has, consequently, erased his emotional deficit to attain that rare position of life president of Mandzah.

When we intimated above that *Born to Rule* had a respectable ancestry in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, we were already obliquely referring to it as a satire. Satire is

A literary manner which blends a critical attitude with humour and wit for the purpose of improving human institutions or humanity. True satirists are conscious of the frailty of institutions of human devising and attempt through laughter not so much to tear them down as to inspire a remodelling (Holman 398).

Born to Rule is a political satire, and Asongwed's subject matter is political rule in African countries. He handles it critically, humorously and wittily with the intention of inspiring a change for the better. True, the author does not speak in his own voice, having created the putative narrator, Nei, who is telling his own story; by so doing, Asongwed maintains his aesthetic distance, and is, therefore, objective.

In the work there is humour and wit, but there is equally hard criticism of some individuals, institutions, organizations and countries. Indeed, Asongwed's satire is wide-ranging and corrosive, scalding just about anyone or anything it runs over. In it few are spared, not even the so-called African revolutionaries who are often gagged and silenced by the lure of lucre. In a section of his book on political regimes in Cameroon, Cardinal Christian Tumi (2006) regrets the easy co-optation, by the autocratic regime in power at the time, of one of the most vocal members of their 'Christian Study Group' in the following words:

Shortly after our meeting with the governor of the Northwest Province, a member of our group, Mr. Solomon Nfor Gwei, was appointed a government minister. It would seem that was Ahidjo's own way of silencing someone who was critical of his regime. From then on, one of our members, who had been a bitter critic of the regime, considerably modified his language. I felt disappointed by his behaviour once he became a member of government. But, I tried to understand him. Perhaps if I had been a father of a family like him, faced with such an opportunity to considerably improve my financial situation, I might have reacted in a similar manner (32).

Through Wan Nei's narration, the author hits hard on the current breed of African heads of state and their Western collaborators, particularly the US and France, who develop their societies at the expense of African fragile economies. Through the discourse of the putative author of the foreword to the text, Tah Asongwed condemns the hypocritical attitude of the so-called developed world and their weapons of mass destruction witnessed during tribal wars in the third world, wars fuelled and romanticized on Western T.V. (28); through Wan Nei's narrative, Asongwed flays lazy African university lecturers who are better but at lechery, alcoholism and rave reviews of publications by incumbency (113-114); and thanks to the peculiar discourse of Nei, Asongwed flagellates those who claim to be in the opposition but are very easily silenced by the power of Mammon (184).

Born to Rule is a text divided into 21 chapters, some with sub-headings. The first five chapters are, respectively, 'Early Childhood', 'Education', 'Initiation into Politics', 'Party Leadership', and 'Party Convention and my Investiture'. The rest of the chapters include, among other things, topics like From Pluralism to Single Party, Appointments in Government, Ministers, Ambassadors, Policies in Key Sectors, Economic Planning, Tourism, Agriculture, Foreign Affairs, Culture, Public Works, Sports, Debt Problem, Internal Security, Taxation, Plots, etc.

Although a fictional autobiography, the text is a useful handbook to politicians, especially aspiring heads of state. However, while it is a good reference document with regard to the organization of the business of government, it is not an ideal blueprint on how to run a government, and this because of its essentially satirical nature. Indeed, its merit as a political text rests on the reverse, i.e. on how not to run a government, for it is Asongwed's intention to flay African autocrats who ruin their countries because of bad governance.

Like other Anglophone Cameroonian satirists, Asongwed is ridiculing and flagellating those in authority with the moral intention of making them change their bad habits for the better. His severe criticism of public officers is an indirect advocacy of good governance, of economic and political transparency in the management of public affairs. Asongwed's ideal society would be one characterized by moral decency, one wherein economic and political abuse would be absent, a society where there is social justice and fairness in the distribution of the wealth of the nation, and not one in which this sharing is skewed in favour of the rich and the powerful, nor in favour of an ethnic group. Asongwed's good society would be one devoid of electoral chicanery (223), corruption, nepotism, gerrymandering, and favouritism. Ultimately, like Bate Besong, Asongwed is, by implication, advocating authentic rigour and moralization in the management of 'La chose publique' (Ambanasom *Education* 146).

As a scathing political text, *Born to Rule*, to a great extent, depends for its satirical effects, on Wan Nei's uninhibited discourse. The language with which Asongwed invests the text's putative author and narrator is the key to the work's effectiveness as satire; for, under normal circumstances, one will hardly find an African or, for that matter, any head of state, talking uninhibitedly and with gusto about his disgraceful rule, in the manner Nei is doing. The kinds of outrageous revelations coming out of his mouth can occur only when, for example, a Christian is confessing exclusively to a priest, or when an individual is mentally talking to himself, or when one is dreaming. This is because when one's inner thoughts are made public, they would certainly not be something of which one would be proud. On the contrary, one's secret thoughts, if disclosed, would evoke in one shame and unease. No individual with a sense of self-pride and dignity would like to make his inner thoughts the object of public scrutiny.

Only in the context of satire would startling disclosures such as those made by Nei be seen for their ultimate fictional intent. A great deal of the humour, wit and criticism is thus couched in Nei's peculiar discourse. Asongwed constructs Wan Nei's character to fit his satirical scheme. He can make Nei, through his language, behaviour and reasoning, stupid, clever, cruel or contradictory. Sometimes Nei talks with his tongue in his cheek; at times he is embarrassingly frank and down to earth; at other times he is simply fantastic. However, since Nei is generally portrayed as a brutal dictator ruled over by the dominant emotions of selfishness, greed, and the crave for power, there is little to endear this corrupt and ruthless politician to the general reader. Most of his outstanding attributes are rather negative ones.

Wan Nei has no illusions about the enticements of wealth and power, especially early in his political career, when he was pressurized, through the agency of the Rev Jerry Dogood and the colonial Governor, to become a political leader: 'I started to marvel at the power of power ... The sheer splendour of what I saw tantalized my fancy' (55). He is frank in acknowledging 'the pressures to which I was subjected to accept the leadership of my people' (56). Then, obviously talking tongue in cheek Nei says: 'People say politics is a dirty game. I say politics is not dirty; people are dirty. *Proof is that I have been in this business now for over fifty years and have neither soiled my hands nor dirtied my name*' (156). (My italics). Another instance where Nei's talking calls forth tongue-in-cheek humour is when he creates the 'Ashawo [Prostitute] Committee' to attempt to regulate the way in which 'prostitutes sleep with their partners. One avenue we are exploring will lead to our allowing the prostitutes to charge customers according to the style and posture adopted during the act' (97). The man's incredible sense of lewd humour is further evident in that memorable, paradoxical episode wherein some of the prostitutes of Mandzah come out, stark naked, demonstrating publicly, accusing the government of 'prying into their private parts' (97-98).

In the same breath, Nei can overstate and understate his case in a situation with ironic and humorous effect that enhances readability:

Rumours have been spread by our enemies worldwide that, in quelling the student demonstration that took place four years ago, my soldiers shot indiscriminately at poor defenceless students. I say that is hogwash. The press, which claims to be so knowledgeable about everything should have done its homework. In the first place, it was a battle between two opposing forces. *The students were armed to the teeth with slogans, petitions and fiery speeches while my soldiers only had armoured cars, tanks, guns, truncheons, tear gas and long drawn out penises to defend themselves against the blighted fury of the massive student crowd* (182). (My italics).

Equally full of ironic humour is the following statement couched in equivocation: 'Our soldiers are *excellent marksmen* although General Bandeh Tandeh tried unsuccessfully to assassinate me last year. *He was executed for being a sloppy marksman*' (182). (My italics)

Nei has no qualms confessing to the kinds of economic measures which he implemented to ruin his own country to the economic advantage of a few wealthy people among the ruling elite. 'We will be self-sufficient in imported rice since we will have enough rice on the market' (102). He

waves aside campaigns by the dissident majority poor and says: 'They are jealous that imported rice is giving a lot of us in government a lot of money, and that if we do the same thing to the other foodstuffs, we would be billionaires while they are left out of the feast' (103).

On the one hand, with no sense of shame, Nei openly declares that he is nepotic and tribalistic, that 'most of the key civil servants in Mandzah come from my ethnic group and that they have a divine right to lead our civil service' (148); on the other, he boldly admits to mortgaging his country to foreign powers and, consequently, boasts that it is impossible for any coup d'état to take place in Mandzah without the blessing of these external countries.

Anyone who thinks he can stage a coup against me and succeed must connive with them because a coup that doesn't have their blessing will not succeed. But since I have made them shareholders and stakeholders in our country – against our people's will – they know that if I am overthrown, they stand to lose all the opportunities I have given them in my country (149).

A head of state who institutionalizes bribery and is proud of encouraging and perpetuating it must be a rare type, the kind constructed only in a satirical work. Nei insists that he would like to 're-state quite categorically that it is not the intention of my government to abolish bribery which we all know is an inexhaustible source of supplementary income to members of the cabinet, our people in uniform and civil servants' (150). Scandalously, he goes on to add that 'our roads are paved with evil intentions and littered with corpses of victims of road accidents. Government is doing everything possible to ensure that the roads are maintained in a permanent state of disrepair, and that road users pay increasingly more bribes' (151).

We intimated above that Nei is a man with a sense of humour; his language at times can be a touch too bawdy for the liking of some like, for example, when, while strenuously trying to refute allegations of sexual promiscuity, he only succeeds in confirming them. 'Do not mind the press that always unearths from the fertile recess of its own imagination falsehoods about my having girl friends strewn all over the country. I debunk all these accusations in lavish detail later on. *Breathes there a man with penis so dead that he has never lusted after a woman?*' (40) (My italics)

Nei can be a philandering husband, choosing any of his female ministers to go to bed with. But should the woman become too generous with other men, the head of state becomes peeved, nasty and insulting, as he does to

Florence Nyanga [Show-off], an illiterate prostitute he had appointed Minister of Social Welfare: 'It was in the last position that Nyanga betrayed me, the party and her country. She took her position too seriously and misunderstood what social welfare means. She started throwing her body into every Tom, Dick and Harry, especially to every dick [penis]...' (121).

A fair amount of the humour in *Born to Rule* equally resides in the names of the characters, some of them either in pidgin, or in the local Baforchu language, or in English. There is Mr. Jiga Karangwa (61) both of which words are in pidgin, meaning respectively, Jigger and Louse or, in short, a nuisance, one who causes trouble to others. No wonder, Mr. Jiga Karangwa is the leader of the radical political party, Mandzah Independence Party (MIP), that advocated political independence against the wishes of the colonial administration. A threat and a nuisance, Mr. Jiga Karangwa had to be frustrated by the administration in favour of the moderate Mandzah Peoples Union (MAPU) led by Wan Nei. Then we have Mr. Shidong (sit down) (49), leader of the Mandzah Workers Union (MAWU) who, as his name implies, goes around the country, inciting workers to observe a nation-wide (sit-down) strike in protest against the government for owing them 'a few months in back pay' (49).

For our example from the Baforchu language, we have a name with a strong, negative connotation, General Mbin Shwiih (167), meaning General Elephantiasis-of-the Scrotum. Very popular among his military colleagues, General Mbin Shwiih is the only man likely to pose a real threat to Wan Nei's ambition to be President for life. To avoid this, Nei offers a juicy diplomatic post abroad to General Mbin Shwiih, far away from home. Obviously the insulting name translates Wan Nei's secret wish that the charismatic general were afflicted with such a crippling disease.

A few names have an English ring to them with obvious meaning. There is Rev Grimm (59) with his grim, diabolical plans to discredit the opposition for alleging that he had been having some hanky panky relationships with the female members of his church. Finally, we have Rev Jerry Dogood (51-53) who, in the colonial days, was sent with gifts and enticements to persuade Wan Nei to become the leader of his country on behalf of the white establishment. From Wan Nei's point of view, Rev Jerry Dogood did a great deal of good to enable him (Nei) to become president for life in Mandzah. Through the construction of these reverend gentlemen, Tah Asongwed is communicating an important fact: both Rev Grimm and Rev Jerry Dogood symbolize the significant, negative role played by the church as it worked alongside the colonial administration in grooming some of Africa's corrupt and brutal dictators.

After everything, then, given the manner in which Asongwed constructs his central subject, the type of language he endows him with, the frank manner in which the character is made to speak, occasionally raising allegations by his political opponents and detractors and then demolishing them; given the way Nei is made to be upfront about his relationship with his Western supporters and collaborators in their organized pillage of the wealth of Mandzah; in view of the way Nei is made to talk shamelessly, without qualms, about his public and private life as if he were making a true confession to a priest; yes, given the idiom Asongwed puts into the mouth of even Dr. George Stanley Peter Jr, the author of the foreword to *Born to Rule*, one can safely conclude that the author's ultimate intention is to provide a reaction, on the part of the African readers, which response will lead to a possible alternative political dispensation with regard to the contemporary political situation in some African countries.

If the welfare of the greatest majority is of primordial importance in any political dispensation, then Wan Nei is a classic example of a neo-patrimonialist and of how not to be a head of state. His conservative ideology disregards basic democratic principles, and will not tolerate any change in the status quo. From his perspective the prevailing hegemony must reign supreme, and that is why he is president for life. *Born to Rule*, thus, constructs the dominant ideology of the epochs of some African grubby dictators in the 20th century. But the text equally challenges the very reactionary ideology. This is done through the construction of the counter, radical ideology upheld by people like Mr. Jigga Karangwa, the opposition political leader, the radical trade unionist, Mr. Shidong, and the other revolutionaries opposed to Wan Nei in general. From the negative representation of Nei, people of goodwill opposed to his autocratic style of governance will likely jump unto the bandwagon of radicalism that challenges his conservatism; and we are talking here of the majority of the oppressed and deprived citizens of Mandzah as well as the sensitive African readers in general, a radical Marxist idea.

Although the bulk of the Anglophone Cameroonian novelists, like their African counterparts, have produced literary works in the critical, realist mode, Francis Nyamnjoh stands out from the lot by virtue of the distinctive, modernist temper of two of his novels. Modernism, according to *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, is the 'philosophy and practices of modern arts: esp: a self-conscious and deliberate break with the past and a search for new forms of expression in any of the arts' (1452). With regard to literature, modernism is a 20th century movement and the aesthetic ideology characteristic of the work of such writers as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, Samuel Beckett and T.S. Eliot, to cite but these few. As a

mode of writing modernism is marked by a distinctive imagination and a clear, deliberate and strong break with traditional forms and techniques of expression. It is a collection of characteristics although not all of them are exhibited by any single writer considered as modernist.

Modernist writers reject traditional values and assumptions, spurn realism and naturalism, and pre-occupy themselves less with the social human being (Holman 274). In contrast they hail the individual and the inner being, dwelling much more on the interior reality and introspection in their depiction of the inner states of the human mind. Thanks to advances in the field of human psychology, one of which is the theory that the significant existence of human beings resides not in the outside world but rather in the mental-emotional processes, some modernist writers have come to use what is now known as the stream-of-consciousness technique: the attempt to reproduce the totality of the raw awareness of the human mind as it actually exists. It is now a psychological truth that were one to make a precise inventory of what goes on in the individual's mind at any given moment, one would discover that the totality of the raw awareness (stream of consciousness) consists of a constant flow of a jumble of sensations, thoughts, memories, associations and reflections. Therefore, if one is to describe the true content of the human mind at any time, then those disconnected, illogical elements must be expressed in a stream of ideas, images and words comparable to the unordered flow of the mind.

Favouring thus this unordered actuality revealed by the stream-of-consciousness technique which they believe brings them closer to life, modernist writers reject chronology and orderliness. In an instructive essay entitled 'Modern Fiction', Virginia Woolf, one of the modernist writers, says 'Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness' (qtd. in Schorer 7). In the same article Mrs. Woolf also makes the point that John Galsworthy, H.G. Wells, and Arnold Bennett are materialistic novelists, pre-occupied with the outward trappings of life instead of with the flickering essence of life itself. She adds:

In contrast with those whom we have called materialists Mr. Joyce is spiritual; he is concerned at all costs to reveal the flickering of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain, and in order to preserve it he disregards with complete courage whatever seems to him adventitious, whether it be probability or coherence or any other of these sign posts which for generations have served to support the imagination of a reader when called upon to imagine what he can neither touch nor see (*Ibid*).

Part of what Virginia Woolf finds commendable in James Joyce is, to some extent, evident in Francis Nyamnjoh's *Mind Searching* (1991)², a modernist novel whose author has thrown overboard much that is commonly considered indispensable to the novel, whether its method be dramatic or descriptive: description of places and people, explanation of environment, a plot of external action pitting two or more opposed forces, arousing dramatic scenes, climaxes and conclusions. With *Mind Searching* we do not have that guide-traveller relation between author and readers, the conventional author who is a calm observer, commenting, explaining and linking up gaps.

Divided into five parts the book's content is narrated as it appears in the mind of the main character, using the stream-of-consciousness technique; for, as its title suggests, the novel is the exploration of the mental landscape of the central character, Yanda. It consists of long narrated passages with tiny morsels of dialogues; and the narrator's colloquial, anecdotal tone is well-captured by the author. This is what Judascious Fanda Yanda says of his narrative technique:

Were I to put my thoughts down on paper just the way they have occurred to me so far, and were I to attempt to have them published, I'm pretty sure they might make no sense to readers who are used to having stories presented in an orderly way with clearly defined themes, sophisticated plots, and consistent styles ... if ever I decide to become a writer, I would have to write the way I think, even if this means writing only for myself, as would most likely be the case (47).

Therefore, whoever is looking for a well-told story with a clearly designed plot, chronological events and well-developed themes and fully fledged characters, will not find any in this 'modern' novel. The characters, pale and vague, are mostly ciphers, simply known as Dr. T., Mrs S., Professor N., and Hon V.M. We do not hear them in conversation, nor see them in action. Most are merely mentioned by the narrator.

While Yanda's narrative method quoted above may have some value because it is life-like and because it takes us closer to the mind of the protagonist and is thus psychologically defensible, it certainly has its drawbacks. For instance, it ignores the fact that some of our thoughts are more significant than others. And the stream-of-consciousness technique seldom gives emphasis to our more important mental processes. Indeed Yanda himself soon realizes this when, on page 133, his more important mental processes are supplanted by less significant ones:

It's strange how crowded my thoughts are! I can't think of a thing without thinking of another! What a mental curse!.. didn't I start by blaming the Honourable V.M. for criticizing me over much? Then why did I abandon that train of thought? Why did I delve in Dr. B's article? Was it timely and appropriate or was it forced? That I can't say, but I fear I have a defective mind! Concentration is what I badly need. For truly a man is no good who cannot concentrate (133).

Of course it is life-like for our thoughts to flow in disorder, but when necessary, we can intentionally concentrate on more important ones. It is realistic for our thoughts to flow in a chaotic way, but it is the duty of the artist to bring, out of the formlessness and chaos of life, order and beauty. But within the context of the aesthetic ideology of modernism which deliberately seeks to break from traditional ways of doing things, fragmentation and the seeming chaos of life it depicts is in order. When Fanda Yanda comments on his narrative technique above, the reader becomes aware of the foregrounding of the element of 'narcissism,' that is, a tendency towards self-reflexivity wherein the text, (*Mind Searching*) focuses on its own end and processes, being a characteristic of modernism/postmodernism (Barry 91).

Yanda's justification for his mind-searching rather than an open-approach to socio-political issues is that the Cameroon at the time of his story is not yet a society of freedom of expression. Vocal critics of the system are picked up and incarcerated, so he is wise enough not to be foolhardy:

That is why I have chosen to keep my mind-searching exercise an internal mental process for as long as it is safe for me. Not until I'm sure and certain that the country is free and democratic enough. That the people have a right to information, and that the authorities are ready to let Truth substitute Rumour, not until then, will I vent my thoughts on paper (26-27).

In his mind searching he enjoys limitless freedom with countless thoughts tumbling over one another for prominence. Often in church Yanda wanders away from the sermon time and again, comes back to it, only to stray off once more. The stream-of-consciousness technique which the author uses here lays bare the raw content of Yanda's mind consisting of all odds and ends, encompassing anecdotes, gossip, hearsay, rumour, facts, memories, reflections and events, etc. This enables the narrator to pass in review all of the unenviable things happening in the Cameroonian society. At times he secretly reads a critical letter cut out from a radical magazine, an article

ensorious of African heads of state, or a fiery correspondence between a friend in Africa and his penpal in Europe.

The ills of the Cameroonian society exposed through Yanda's naïve and insouciant approach to issues include bribery and corruption, perpetuation of mediocrity, prostitution, superstition, hypocrisy, governmental squandermania, and forgery, etc. However, Yanda does not criticize the system with the intention of proposing a better moral alternative. He simply exposes it for what it is and himself benefits from its venality. For he is helped and given a job by Hon V.M. as private secretary; he is admitted into the university even without the entry qualification requirement; and, because of his influence in the public service and connection with the Hon. V.M., Yanda, unrelated to the Minister by either kinship or ethnicity, is now known to belong to the same tribe with him, a corrupt development that makes him the logical, 'legitimate' heir to the Hon. V.M. The latter 'has stayed in the government for a long enough time to nominate whom he would like to succeed him. It is strange how God does his things! ... Who could have imagined three years back that the Honourable V.M. would choose me of all to succeed him?' (158)

Once secure with a good job, Yanda hypocritically becomes a staunch defender of the system he had raised questions about. Henceforth, he will not tolerate vocal critics of the government. Rather, he would like radical sociologists to be concerned with harmless research projects 'with no biting criticism of those in power or of the system in place' (155). This is similar to the historical change of heart by an erstwhile critic of the Ahidjo regime already quoted above (Tumi 32). There is a sense in which it can be said, therefore, that *Mind Searching* is morally nihilistic; it is utterly destructive and provides no positive values as a basis for its satire. When initially Yanda poses as a critic of societal ills, the reader has the impression that he will be held up as a moral ideal. Unfortunately, however, he only ends up being compliant with the venal practices.

Francis Nyamnjoh would seem to be saying, through the rise to prominence of mediocre Yanda, that this is how the system comes by its ministers, in the main, immoral and mediocre elements. It does not matter that they are Christians. Indeed, the insistence on Yanda's regular church attendance is to point out the moral irrelevance of the church in the face of the pervasive malpractice going on in the society. Christians commit all types of immorality without any qualms. Yanda may be a regular church goer, but the church's moral teachings do not seem to have gone through him. The novelist is saying this is how a morally mediocre system perpetuates itself. The conservative ideology Yanda indirectly attempts to fight and criticize ends up co-opting him. Therefore, at the end of the

novel, the conservative political system, essentially the legacy of President Ahidjo's reign marked by a great deal of fear and secret incarceration of political opponents, remains intact.

But it is in *The Disillusioned African* (1995)³ that Francis Nyamnjoh constructs a radical ideology to confront a prevailing hegemony. Set in Cameroon in the early 1990s in the context of contemporary world politics, and against the background of the wind of change that had blown from Eastern Europe in the 1980s, Francis Nyamnjoh's second novel is purportedly written during an imaginary visit to the United Kingdom by the Cameroonian hero-philosopher and putative author, Charles Keba. A philosopher by his own admission, Charles has gone to Britain 'to amass authority in philosophy' (5). He is understandably very pre-occupied with philosophical reflections, or in his own words, 'Philomeditations'. It is while in Britain to study philosophy that he writes four long letters to his friend back home in Cameroon, Franglotus Moungo. But the fifth letter is the one written to the readers by Franglotus Moungo.

In his first letter (Part One of the text) as he arrives in Britain and is yet to gather his first impressions about this 'Queendom' and send back home, Charles turns his critical gaze first on the condition of his home continent, Africa, milked forever like a cow by its leaders under the supervision of bloated, Western capitalists. We are talking of the Africa that has had political but not economic independence, the Africa wherein the white masked dancers have withdrawn to the background and are replaced by their shadows, the black pawns, ushering in the 'dance of the puppets'. Dominated by their greed the latter plunder their state funds and stash away in foreign banks, while making empty promises to their citizens and the outside world. Callous and unconscionable tyrants, these so-called leaders are the economic destroyers of Africa.

In his second epistle Charles turns his satirical eye on peculiar British habits some of which include 'the weather', that eternal favourite topic of conversation, the taciturnity of the English people on trains, little church going in the U.K., the excessive materialism of the British people, the commercialization of the female body on T.V., the homelessness of English people in their own land, white superstition like the great fear of passing under a ladder, or the dread of Friday the 13th etc. Charles is struck by the paradoxical habits of whites tanning themselves black and blacks bleaching themselves white.

In his third letter Charles engages in merciless self-criticism: that he has come but to Britain to study African philosophy in vain, a situation that makes him not quite different from some of those he has castigated. Ashamed of himself, Charles shifts his criticism onto those Africans who

claim to be more European than the Europeans themselves, especially the transplanted 'Eton of the Bush', the Kamuzu Academy that does not 'answer to the need of the country' (101). He then takes a severe look at cross-cultural experiences and negative stereotypical European views of Africans. Charles ends the letter with the fantastic memo by the Belgian Minister of the Colonies to missionaries going to the Belgian Congo ('Zaire') in 1920. This is the country Charles now wants to visit for its pioneering role in the development of African philosophy. Some scandalous imperial Belgian principles given out to the Missionaries are: 'Teach your pupils to believe and not to reason ... Consider all blacks as little children whom you must continue to deceive and manipulate even long after independence ... Teach them a doctrine whose precepts you yourselves will not put into practice, etc' (117-119).

Then in his fourth and last letter Charles criticizes the whites, especially the French who rationalize monopolism in tropical Africa while encouraging democratic pluralism in Eastern Europe, a policy that, in Africa, gives rise to dictatorial excesses and misrule, upholding French economic and cultural hegemony. There is an attack on chicken-hearted Cameroonians who hardly reason beyond their stomachs. The letter ends with a review of the collapse of dictatorial communist regimes in Eastern Europe, especially the popular uprising against 'the Butchers of Bucharest,' Mr and Mrs Ceausescu, and its effect on the balance of power between the key world ideologies of Capitalism and Communism, between the West and the East.

The final Part Five of the novel consists of the only letter written by Franglotus Mounjo to the readers, explaining what has since happened to Charles Keba when he left the UK for Zaire and eventually to his village in Menchum, Cameroon. Now bereft of his hands, one lost in a shoot-out at Kinshasa Airport, and the other at the launching of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) party in Bamenda, Charles Keba is back to his rural Menchum, community to revolutionize the peasant masses with his subversive ideas. The rural folk are now said to be speaking out courageously and openly asking questions that embarrass the rich and the powerful. Charles is teaching them to convert their sweat and toil into economic and political power in the hope of eventually combating and rooting out the current so-called elitist model of democracy, freedom, justice and power. When the peasant masses will have been so successfully conscientized, then the elitist model of governance 'shall have met its Waterloo' (149).

The title of this work constitutes its apt theme: the disillusionment of Charles Keba. Charles' disillusionment is in several senses. He is disillusioned with himself for going to study African philosophy in the UK where there is no university with a department for that specialization;

disillusioned with his experience in the Hospital for Tropical Diseases where he nearly died of a raging malarial bout while British medical doctors carried out forever their slow and annoying tests; disillusioned with the paradoxical attitude of the French, the fountainhead of 'Liberté, Fraternité et Egalité,' who rationalize monopartism in tropical Africa while encouraging multipartism in Eastern Europe; disenchanted with the inability of the African people to overthrow their dictators in the way Ceausescu and his consort were ousted in Eastern Europe; disappointed with the so-called African democratic ruling elite falsifying election results in their favour to remain in power; and disillusioned with the opposition parties that make no provision for decision-making with regard to illiterate peasant masses, nor do they fight genuine corruption.

For all his disillusionment, Charles is more sympathetic and tolerant towards the suffering African masses. While he is more positive towards Africans caught up within the sites of cross-cultural encounters, he is definitely critical of African rulers and their impoverishing leadership; he is more critical of Africans ashamed of their African origins or African apers who claim to be more English or French than these Europeans, but know next to nothing about their own culture. Charles is more condemnatory of American or European anthropologists with their stereotypical attitudes and beliefs about Africans; and more censorious of the hegemonic attitude of some Western powers, especially the French, eager to hold sway over certain parts of Africa. According to Charles, it would be better for Africans if competing European hegemonies were to operate in their societies than if there were only one dominant power, 'lest one good custom should corrupt the world,' to quote Alfred Lord Tennyson (Abrams 1971).

Consequent on this disillusionment is a related theme: the role of the intellectual in society. *The Disillusioned African* is a novel of ideas, and the most central idea, and one of its major themes, is the place of the genuine intellectual in emerging democratic African societies. Francis Nyamnjoh, in an artistic manner, i.e. through the letters of Charles and Mounjo, explores and articulates the role of the genuine African intellectual in societies where politics is still marked by the hegemony of the so-called democratic ruling elite who have virtually hijacked the wealth produced by the indigent masses. Though a minority the political elite, through corruption and organized pillage, control the economic resources of their societies.

If Charles' imaginary sojourn and trajectory from Cameroon to Britain and back, if his movement from high, critical intellectualism and then down to earth is anything to go by, then what Nyamnjoh is saying is that the genuine African intellectual should go beyond being a mere egg-head; he

must move from the high ivory tower of mere ideas to the hard realities on the ground. He must become altruistic by taking an active part in ameliorating the living condition of his people. And this will be best done through the sensitization, conscientization or education of the socially deprived, or the dregs of humanity, to become aware of their own socio-political potential. Once these people are politically conscious, they will initiate meaningful change in their society, leading to an improvement of their human condition.

As one follows Charles' sweeping critical intelligence from the first to the fourth letter, encompassing Cameroonian, African, British, European, and indeed, world, socio-cultural and economic issues, one cannot but acknowledge that here, indeed, is an intellectual with highly developed critical powers. Charles is really in his element talking about contemporary world socio-political issues, but what bothers him most is the human condition of the African struggling masses. The more one delves into Charles' critical discourse, the more one is reminded of Bernard Fonlon's model of 'the genuine intellectual' as spelt out in his book *The Genuine Intellectual* (1978).

Incidentally in *The Disillusioned African* (103) Nyamnjoh echoes Fonlon, while on page 95 of the same text, he quotes Fonlon. Besides, Louise Cuming's citation in her foreword to *The Disillusioned African* (iii) with regard to the intellectuals' role in politics is from Fonlon's *To Every African Freshman..* (90), or *The Genuine Intellectual* (137). These intertextual echoes would seem to point to the fact that Nyamnjoh's central character, Charles Keba, the Philosopher, was probably conceived with Fonlon's model in mind.

Fonlon's genuine intellectual is one with a university-level education, specialized in a subject area; he possesses a scientific-philosophic spirit that makes him question, doubt, and criticize things deeply rather than just accepting them facilely. He is one who is fearless, courageous and ever seeking after truth and knowledge. But, according to Fonlon, the intellectual is not just trained for his own sake to be admired and worshipped as if he were 'a golden calf in the wilderness of ignorance and mediocrity' (*Genuine Intellectual* 129). The genuine intellectual is trained so that he can be of service to his immediate and wider human community. In Fonlon's words the genuine intellectuals are people with 'a deep, keen and lofty sense of dedication to the service of the commonwealth, immediate community of which they are members, and thereby, to the service of the world as a whole, of humanity at large' (129). Fonlon's accent is thus on the altruism of the genuine intellectual. In his third letter to Mounjo, Charles, echoing Fonlon, says:

May the Almighty God bless and replenish the efforts of the Genuine African Intellectual. Remember that the criterion by which one qualifies as a Genuine Intellectual isn't Western Education, but selflessness in the service to the general public. Without being sufficiently altruistic, a Professor, Doctor in the Western sense of these words, is of no relevance to Africa today (103).

The sensitive reader who follows Charles' searching, critical thought from Part One to Part Four of the novel, and carefully reads Moungo's letter (Part Five) to the readers and noting what it says about Charles, will certainly realize that Charles has moved from the heights of high intellectualism and criticism to the local realism of his rural Menchum community. The university-level intellectual has logically put his scientific and philosophical knowledge, as advocated by Fonlon, to the service of his immediate community and humanity as a whole. Charles has 'decided to conduct the fight from the only angle he believed true change was possible' (149): from among the rural peasants of his Menchum locality, specifically 'the resettled but forgotten victims of the 1986 Lake Nyos Disaster' (*Ibid*).

The didactic significance of such a humanitarian act for anyone who aspires to the status of a genuine intellectual is thus obvious and best summed up by the concluding portion of Moungo's letter to the readers, many of whom may consider themselves as intellectuals:

So he (Charles) teaches the peasants how to make political and economic capital out of their sweat and toil, and out of the ignorance and lazy habits of their urban-centred overlords.

And it is for these reasons, dear readers, that I broke my promise to a friend at heart. I thought Charles had something to share with more than just a friend. It is my hope and wish that some of you might be inspired to work along similar lines, and that one day the situation will be well and truly better for the downtrodden and the forgotten bulk of our Darkened Continent (150).

As already intimated above, in writing this novel Nyamnjoh employs, from the point of view of technique, the epistolary device; for *The Disillusioned African* is constructed in five parts, each being an epistle, a long sprawling letter. The first four letters are written by the major putative author, Charles Keba, and the last (fifth) letter, shedding some light on Charles' activity, is by Moungo. *The Disillusioned African* is a unique epistolary novel. If one comes to the text expecting to find a swift flowing narrative

with a chronological plot and well developed characters, one will be disappointed. If, as the overall shape of the work indicates, one looks forward to reading reasonably short letters from one character to another with an immediate reply to them, one will equally be disappointed.

On the contrary, what we find in the text are one-way epistles addressed to a friend who does not reply to them in a conventional form; we read but long, very long academic, or at times, philosophical letters, constructed in a manner peculiar to the speculative essayist. Indeed, the more one peruses the epistles, the more one feels that they are essays punctuated with the appropriate colloquial, anecdotal, informal tone of the letter or speculative essay.

Like the essay Nymanjoh's text privileges ideas, facts and information over characters and plot. In his letters Charles adopts the stream-of-consciousness technique spelt out on page 47 of the previous novel, *Mind Searching* (1991), wherein there is no chronology in the narration. His ideas often flow following the way thoughts flow in his mind, in a disorderly fashion. Essentially, then, like the earlier text, *The Disillusioned African* is a modernist novel, and as such, cannot conveniently fit into the matrix of the conventional, traditional novel.

To be sure, it does possess elements found in the traditional novel; but it equally possesses a great deal that we do not usually associate with the conventional. *The Disillusioned African* is a satirical, political novel that gives preference to ideas over fictional form. The author's intention is to instruct and persuade the readers to view things the way he sees them, in his radical manner. The text is constructed in a discourse that espouses visionary radicalism in favour of the oppressed and exploited masses of Africa, particularly the voiceless, illiterate peasants. Nyamnjoh, through his mouthpiece Charles Keba, debunks and exposes sham, pretence and hypocrisy wherever they may be found – whether in Africa or in Europe. But his heart goes out more to the African proletariat chafing under the yoke of their so-called leaders and their foreign capitalist collaborators.

Now, after all of Charles' philosophical reflections and criticism, it dawns on him that his fundamental mission is, ultimately, that of grassroots education. It becomes clear to him that his great service to his immediate community and humanity as a whole is to spend the rest of his time educating the peasant masses in his locality so that when they will have been sufficiently conscientised to stand up to face the Western-educated elite fearlessly, then the oppressors will have met 'their Waterloo' (149). We have here a historical image, an allusion to the battle of Waterloo in 1815 which saw the final defeat of Napoleon by the British and allied forces under Duke Wellington, near the Belgian village of Waterloo. Just as

Duke Wellington made history by defeating the almighty and seemingly invulnerable emperor, so does Nyamnjoh expect the radicalized peasant masses to make history when they eventually confront the political oppressors and dictators to usher in a new political era, a classic realization of a Marxist principle.

When we come to his third novel, *A Nose for Money*, (2006), we notice Francis Nyamnjoh's sharp criticism of the socio-political situation of his country; however, it is only by implication that the possibility for an alternative hegemony is urged. During the discussion of this novel in Chapter Five, we affirmed that while economic activities and financial malpractice are foregrounded, politics pulsates rather significantly in the background. We therefore need not repeat here all that we have already said in that chapter concerning *A Nose for Money*.

If, in the educational sense, Charles Keba represents the hope of the deprived peasants of rural Menchum, in the same sense, it can be said that Ngwe, the central character in J. N. Nkengasong's *Across the Mongolo*, is the symbol of Anglophone hope in the Federal Republic of Kamangola. Set in Cameroon around the mid-sixties and the seventies, *Across the Mongolo* (2004)⁴ is a novel that highlights Anglophone subalternity within the Francophone hegemony in the bilingual Federal Republic of Kamangola. Because of the insurmountable obstacles he faces, Ngwe fails to obtain an academic degree at Besaadi University and emerges at the end of the story virtually bleeding from physical torture; however, he also comes out of his traumatic experiences wiser, with enough, political education to become leader of the Young Anglophone Movement, an act of educational significance.

After a sound secondary school education in the Anglophone state of Kama, the novel's central character, Ngwe Nkemassah proceeds to the Francophone state of Ngola in the bilingual Federal Republic of Kamangola to acquire university education in Besaadi, the only university in Kamangola. But it is in Besaadi, within the hegemonic influence of the French language, that Ngwe meets his academic Waterloo. (Ambanasom Review *Across the Mongolo* 4)

To better appreciate what is happening in *Across the Mongolo*, the reader should bear in mind the socio-historical context in which the text was constructed. History has it that since 1961, the year of the union between the former French and British Cameroons, the effects of European colonial history, English and French bilingualism became a national policy in the Republic of Cameroon. At the turn of the 21st century the Anglophone Cameroonians number at least 5 million out of a total population of about 17 million Cameroonians, constituting thus a linguistic and cultural minority.

In the text the friction between the majority Francophones and the

minority Anglophones is therefore one constructed by the realities of the larger social context and based essentially on the psychology of numbers. It is a battle of complexes, more or less, wherein, impelled by their numerical strength, to go by Ngwe's narration and reasoning, Francophones feel that they should colonise and assimilate the Anglophones, that the dominant Francophone culture should lord it over the Anglo-Saxon culture. The narrator sees this relationship in terms of master/slave binary opposition, with the Anglophone assigned the subaltern status of the inferior Other (65, 108, 163, 164).

This explains the hegemonic influence of French, particularly in the University of Besaadi where major courses are dispensed, and all examinations written, in French in a country that calls itself the bilingual Federal Republic of Kamangola. This would equally account for the hostility mounted against the Anglophone wherever he attempts to speak in English, whether it is in the District Officer's (D.O's) office, or in one of the university offices, or, above all, in this university lecture hall, of all places! (64-65).

One discerns in this attitude the Francophone imperial text that sets out to rewrite itself in the Anglophone inferior Other. But there is a big gulf between the 'pure text' and 'performance'; when pushed to the limit to express himself in French in an office, Ngwe blurts out only what can be termed barbarism committed on the French language: 'Je suis dit que' (61), literally translating the English 'I'm saying that'. This, of course, subverts the Francophone colonial 'text' that has produced an intolerable 'performance'. That is why the scandalized Francophone Ngwe is addressing urges him to go ahead with his English that had been shushed out of him, in the first place. 'Non, non, non. Continuez en Anglais' (61).

Until he comes into contact with Francophones, Ngwe's school life is generally smooth and uneventful as he passes through Wysdom College and College of Arts. Things begin to turn sour when he crosses the Mongolo (the Mungo), the Great River, that physical and symbolic point of demarcation between the Anglophone State of Kama, and the Francophone State of Ngola, which two federated states form the bilingual Federal Republic of Kamangola. The brutality that characterizes the Francophones in general starts right from the boundary between the two states.

Here Anglophones coming into contact with Francophones for the first time are humiliated and physically assaulted by gendarmes on control who ask for particulars like 'impôts' and 'pièces', or command an elderly Anglophone passenger to sit on the ground, 'Assois-toi' (40). Before he gets to Besaadi, Ngwe is robbed of all his money, making him perpetually dependent on his kind friend, Nwolefeck. He is almost killed in the University Resto when he struggles to get into the queue for food; he is

brutalized during a student riot; above all, when he forms the Young Anglophone Movement to fight for Anglophone rights, Babajaro sends his wild police after him. Ngwe avoids death only by escaping to hide in the village.

Unlike in the Anglophone citadel of academic excellence of Wysdom College and College of Arts where discipline, orderliness, hardwork, and merit are the cardinal values for success, in Besaadi, fraud, personal interest, gambling, injustice and disorder are the order of the day. In the novel Francophones ideologically ‘textualize’ the Anglophone as the inferior Other. Their orientalisng attitude consists in perceiving him as a kind of comic freak whose behaviour gives rise to debasing appellations like ‘anglofou, anglobête, esclave, salaud’ etc..

Ngwe goes through a great deal of humiliation, degradation and grinding frustration which inflict on him traumatic stress disorders that, several times, bring him close to a nervous breakdown before he is finally done in. But he draws on his great presence of mind and is determined to make it in Besaadi. However, for all his tenacity onto his ethic of hard work and honesty, after six years in the university, and even changing faculties, his academic endeavours end in failure, leaving him with zero degree.

Gradually, it dawns on him that his humiliation is not an isolated fact but one shared by other Anglophones; it becomes clear to him that the Francophone government in place has a hidden agenda for a subtle deconstruction of the Anglophone identity in the United Republic of Kamangola, with the university as the experimental nursery ground and that the Anglophones co-opted into the government are there to destroy the Anglo-Saxon culture. Consequently, Ngwe concludes that the older generation of Anglophones have failed and that unless the young people do something to rescue the situation soon, the Anglo-Saxon swan song may well soon be sung. Consequently, he forms the Young Anglophone Movement (YAM) to help keep alive the Anglo-Saxon heritage, to fight for the Anglophone rights to full citizenship and not just to be ‘some assistant somebody’ (138). In short, YAM’s goal is to uphold the Anglophone identity.

To expand the scope of Anglophone victimhood and the education of the deprived, the author brings Ngwe into contact with Dr. Ambo, a PhD holder and the lone Anglophone lecturer in Besaadi university. Organized and hard-working, Dr. Ambo is intelligent and principled. Unfortunately, he does not teach full courses since he must do so only in French, a language, he does not master. Ngwe benefits a great deal from Dr. Ambo’s critical intelligence and the subtle education of victimized Anglophone students.

It is thanks to Dr. Ambo’s connection that Ngwe finds himself at the

reception in the residence of a junior Anglophone Minister in charge of Special Duties at the Presidency, Mr. Wankili, a pivotal episode in the text with regard to the Anglophone Problem and subalternity. It is here that Ngwe becomes more conscientised concerning the Anglophone condition of coloniality and inferior Otherness. The junior Anglophone Minister's outrageous declaration that his office will not be the place for solving petty Anglophone problems (134) as well as the import of the conversation of two elderly Anglophone citizens, goes a long way to radicalize the young man. A statement from the conversation of the Anglophone citizens avers that the 'Francophone government uses our Anglophone brothers to destroy us, to ruin our heritage, to assimilate us, to clearly wipe out Anglophone traditions from the face of this country' (135).

That conversation marks a turning point in the life of Ngwe; he will never be the same person again. Its immediate effect on him is his resolve to form the Young Anglophone Movement (YAM), aimed at educating the Anglophones about their rights and full citizenship, and not to be contented with any second class status or 'an assistant citizen' (142). Such an education will produce Anglophones proud of their Anglo-Saxon legacy and not traitorous sell-outs and apologists for the majority Francophone culture. Among the Anglophone traitors must feature Kwenti, the Anglophone clerk who refuses to speak English to Anglophones, or the Anglophone police officer who instructs his Francophone colleagues in French to maltreat Ngwe better, or Junior Minister Wankili who declares publicly that he has nothing to do with 'Anglophone'.

These and similar Anglophones, eager to be associated or identified with the majority Francophone culture, facilitate the execution of Babajaro's assimilationist ideology. Since YAM's fundamental intention is to subvert such an ideology, Ngwe, its fountainhead, becomes the sure target of Babajaro's dreaded police, from whom Ngwe has had a close shave. It is symbolically significant that at the end of the text, though physically and psychologically tortured and traumatized, the hero is still alive. He is the symbol of Anglophone hope. According to the Prince of Concealed Secrets, 'This child is of the powerful breed ... his anguish is the beginning of his mission in the world, a mission to rescue his people trapped into slavery in a far away land' (199), a declaration whose importance is even more heightened by its rhetorical placement: located in the text's penultimate page and paragraph.

It is now appropriate to say something about the Anglophone Problem already mentioned above. In the Republic of Cameroon, made up of, as we have said, the majority Francophones and minority Anglophones, the Anglophone Problem is the sum total of Anglophone grievances and wrongs

that Anglophones express against their Francophone partners in the political union. In the words of Nja'ah Peter Toh (2001):

The Anglophones equally argue that successive Francophone regimes have pursued the policy of assimilation aimed at wiping out their identity. For instance, in 1983, the government promulgated an order modifying the General Certificate of Education (GCE) examination (Anglophone examinations) to be similar to the French Baccalaureat. There were general protest (sic) organised all over the country by the Anglophone community devoid of political leanings. The problem was so intense that the church in Cameroon became very vocal against the government's decision (53).

In Buea, on the 2nd and 3rd April, 1993, the first ever All Anglophone Conference took place and over 5.000 Anglophones from all walks of life attended that conference to adopt a common stand with regard to constitutional issues related to their destiny in Cameroon. They crystalised their grievances against the Francophones and enshrined them in the now famous *Buea Declaration*, part of which reads as follows:

Within these thirty-two years, our Union accord has been violated. We have been disenfranchised, marginalized, and treated with suspicion. Our interests have been disregarded. Our participation in national life has been limited to non-essential functions. Our natural resources have been ruthlessly exploited without any benefit accruing to our territory or to its people. The development of our territory has been negligible and confined to areas that directly or indirectly benefit Francophones. Through manoeuvres and manipulations, we have been reduced from partners of equal status in the Union to the status of a subjugated people.

The common values, vision, and goals which we share as a people and those of our Francophone partners in the Union are different, and clearly cannot blend within the framework of a Unitary State such as was imposed on us in 1972 ...

The so-called 'Peace Revolution' of 1972 was a ploy by Francophones to use their overwhelming majority to alter the basis of reunification for which Anglophones, and Anglophones ONLY, had voted. The 1972 referendum was illegal in so far as it was not in conformity with the procedure which the constitution had laid down for the amendment of its provisions and also in so far as its aim was not only to impair the Federation's unity and integrity, but to abolish the

Federation itself (qtd. in Ambanasom *Education* 27 – 28).

It is interesting to note that barely three years after reunification, in 1964, and nearly 30 years before the convening of the All Anglophone Conference, Professor Bernard Fonlon, with an uncanny sense of foresight, had prefigured what would happen. According to him, unless the Francophone leadership, on whose shoulders lay the responsibility of steering Cameroon to its projected bicultural mission, was honest enough to accept the good things in the Anglo-Saxon culture, there was little chance for the survival of the latter in Cameroon (Fonlon 'Will We Make or Mar?' 12).

From the themes and issues raised in the text as well as the art informing the novel, we can affirm that what Nkengasong's imaginative work makes us 'see' or 'perceive' is the social mentality, the dominant ideology of the world from which the novel springs, and this is the epoch of President Ahmadou Ahidjo. Ideologically speaking, from the issues evoked in the novel, the shadowy but dreaded personality of Babajaro (Ahidjo) and his authoritarian rule, his ubiquitous and brutal police force, and the assimilationist educational policy that prevails at Besaadi to the detriment of Anglophones in a country that calls itself the Federal bilingual Republic of Kamangola, one can conclude that the political ideology in place is authoritarianism, defined by Andrew Heywood as 'a belief that a strong central authority, imposed from above is either desirable or necessary and, therefore, demands unquestioning obedience' (328). However, this is contested by a counter ideology, federalism, emblemized by the Young Anglophone Movement (YAM) led by the brave and courageous central male character, Ngwe. YAM symbolizes Anglophones' hope and the Anglo-Saxon legacy in Kamangola. In other words Ngwe is struggling to maintain the ideology of federalism, equally defined by Heywood as 'A territorial distribution of power based on the sharing of sovereignty between central (usually national) bodies and periphery ones' (331).

Under the dominant prevailing ideology, the risks Anglophones like Ngwe and YAM run are real as testified below by a different kind of historical document:

We left the governor's office feeling satisfied. We, however, still ran the risk of being arrested, of becoming political prisoners! We were then not conscious of the risk we were running by openly criticizing an autocratic regime and its government, and through them the President of the Republic himself. We had forgotten that we were of Anglo-Saxon culture, with its very highly developed sense of freedom of expression, and that we were facing people of a culture that was

different from ours (Tumi 32).

A bald statement of facts as contained in our summary and thematic exploration of *Across The Mongolo* is, indeed, inadequate, except, for a modest analysis of the text. These facts and ideas say little or nothing concerning the art that informs the work, the quality of the language, drama, feelings and emotions of the characters involved. They convey very little of the tension and excitement that Nkengasong so successfully evokes, which is his forte. Consequently, we will attempt to highlight some of the expressive devices of technique employed by the author to achieve the novel's overall aesthetic effect.

The first of them is the use of madness as technique which allows the author to assume a unique and interesting angle of vision. Rarely do we find in a novel a dominant first person narrative perspective alongside that of the omniscient narrator. We must, nevertheless, concede at the same time that there is no limit to what a creative play with language can achieve. Therefore, *Across the Mongolo* is a text whose creative construction allows for the existence of both, and this thanks to the author's ingenious deployment of madness as a device of technique. How this operates will be discovered by and by.

To achieve his desired angle of vision the author renders his central consciousness, Ngwe, mad, but not completely so. Ngwe's madness comes only at the end of his disappointing university experience. The novel then opens at this point where news about the mental derangement of this young man spreads like wild fire, the victim having been arrested and brought all the way from the city to a shrine in his rural Lebialelem for traditional treatment by Aloho – Mbong, the priest of Fuandem.

The priest administers a concoction of herbs to him, putting some of it into his ears, his nostrils and some for him to drink in order to help him talk and tell the story of his life, and the cause of his madness. The ritualistic treatment produces the desired effect on Ngwe as he begins to talk, the shrine becoming his confessional, so to speak. Before Aloho-Mbong and some members of the local council, Ngwe starts to narrate his story which makes up the material in the text. However, and this is technically very significant, there are interruptions in Ngwe's narrative when he suffers occasional bouts of seizure. And it is during the relapse that the omniscient narrator makes his interpolations, four in number, corresponding to four chapters: One, Four, Thirteen and Nineteen. Thus in a novel of nineteen chapters four are recounted by the omniscient narrator, and fifteen by Ngwe.

Ngwe's tale is in three parts; part one comprises chapters two and three;

part two stretches from chapter five to twelve; and part three covers chapter fourteen to eighteen. Each section ends with a dramatic retrogression in Ngwe's mental condition. In this regard the ending of part three is particularly striking in the sense that he suffers a psycho-somatic effect; that is, when Ngwe is describing a troubled moment leading to his incipient insanity, the latter, paradoxically and effectively, comes on him again, so that the part of the narrative becomes not merely a re-enactment of madness but real madness, bringing to the final end Ngwe's first person narration.

The novel is then rounded up, as it was begun, by the omniscient narrator, making the interesting narrative structure of *Across the Mongolo* one that is not the work of chance but the result of a careful artistic design. The reconstruction of Ngwe's story makes for the use of elaborate flashbacks, reminding us of the plot construction of some of the best Nigerian movies very common in Cameroon these days.

After perusing Ngwe's story, the conscientious reader, upon careful reflection, will realize that following Ngwe's physical movement from Kama to Ngola and back to Kama, his overall story is structured roughly obeying the logic of a triadic dialectic, that is, following the dialectical relationship of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. In this respect Ngwe's educational career from primary to high school in the state of Kama is smooth and relatively uneventful. This constitutes the thesis. When he gets to Ngola for University education, however, he encounters a hostile and violent environment. Dialectically speaking, this becomes the antithesis, ushering in a conflictual situation leading to mental instability and incongruence in the young man.

For him, it is a question of to die or not to die, to echo Shakespeare's Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark. Thanks to the timely intervention of his lover, Shirila, Ngwe is saved from imminent death but not from ultimate insanity. For him to be appropriately cured of his madness, however, the author takes him back to Kama where under Aloh-Mbong's ritual care his health is gradually restored. This is the synthesis, which becomes the new thesis, reflecting the new Ngwe at 'the beginning of his mission in the world, a mission to rescue his people trapped into slavery in a far away land' (199).

Having chosen a victimized, otherwise ambitious young man, who has passed through challenging and trying situations and must now tell his own harrowing tale from a convalescent position, the author endows him with a unique idiom of more than ordinary beauty. Therefore, the discourse used by such a frustrated and disappointed man must be one that will carry effectively his frustration, bitterness, madness, anger and hatred against those responsible for his condition. Such an idiom is bound to be forceful and spirited, in short, lyrical in places.

Indeed, tinged with the eloquence of a mad brain, such is the lyrical

power of Ngwe's narrative that it constitutes for this writer a key attraction and beauty of *Across the Mongolo*. Poetry is thus integral to this text, being part and parcel of it. We are not talking here of purple poetic patches inserted as an afterthought into the completed narrative such that if expunged, the text will not suffer. No. We are talking of poetry that is an organic component of the novel. In other words if one were to delete the poetry from Ngwe's narrative, there would be no *Across the Mongolo*.

The more obviously lyrical aspects are those areas of the text where there are invocations wherein Ngwe is praying to Fuandem or addressing the spirit of his late father, etc. But the usual poetic portions are those rhythmic parts of his narration marked by the rise and fall of his emotions, by his turbulent state of mind, depending on the nature of the physical, emotional, or mental pain inflicted on him. When his activities are frenzied or whenever Ngwe becomes hysterical, his prose, by the same token, becomes lyrical. On a few occasions the writing can become nonsensical or surrealistic, all of which qualities are symptomatic of Ngwe's incipient insanity. When, however, he is at peace with himself, or on the same romantic wave length with his one-time sweetheart, Shirila, Ngwe is appropriately rhapsodic. At such moments he paints beautiful descriptions of Shirila, rhapsodizing her in memorable language.

The overall positive effect of this lyricism cannot be overemphasized. It endows the tale with high readability; it instils liveliness in the prose and discards boredom in the reader; it captures the attention of the readers and keeps them reading on and on. It makes for interesting, psychological and, therefore, realistic character exploration, especially that of the central consciousness. It is a quality likely to invite the reader back to the work, long after he must have read and put it away. Examples are many. With regard to invocation and prayer one can make reference to pages 36, 94 and 159; the general lyrical portions include, among others, those on the following pages: 33, 110, 111, 112, 114, 138, 158, 163, 164, 165, 191, 192, etc.

Here we will quote two passages, a short and a long one, to illustrate some of the means by which the lyrical effects are achieved:

Then, leaning on the wall, I cried. I could not say what I was doing there. What offence had I committed against man, against God? Why did they maltreat an innocent child that much? Why was I made to suffer assault and brutality without cause? Why was I born an Anglophone? Mother, my mother, you had refused my going away from you! Here was your son in a university taking lectures in a dungeon to become a man tomorrow. Here is your son in this dark

hole taking lectures to become a corpse. Here I was, who wanted to be like Babajoro of Kamangola in my lecture hall, what I had travelled hundreds of miles away from you to do. Soldiers and policemen have become my teachers in the detention room (110).

This short passage carries Ngwe's thoughts following his mistreatment by soldiers and police. They have just hurled him into a dark cell containing naked criminals. The lyrical effects are realized by means of, first, a succession of four rhetorical **wh** – questions followed by an exclamatory statement, an apostrophe, to Ngwe's mother. This, in turn, is followed by three parallel statements whose initial beginnings are: 'Here was your son ... Here is your son ... Here I was ...' The passage is then beautifully clinched by an ironic statement, a reminder and a synopsis of the parallel statements: 'Soldiers and policemen have become my teachers in the detention room'.

Incidentally, a slight portion of this passage: 'Why was I born an Anglophone? Mother, my mother' recalls a similar utterance in Okot p'Bitek's poem *Song of Ocol*.

'Mother, mother,
Why,
Why was I born
Black?' (p'Bitek 126)

The intertextual echoes seem to affirm the centrality of the mother figure in the imagination of a sensitive African child at a critical existential moment in his life.

Here is the second, longer passage:

"I sat at the edge of the pavement of the faculty, staring into the vacancy of the mundane universe of a university. The happy ones who spoke the language of my brothers on the other side of the Great River laughed and chatted merrily about the place. The Anglo, the pariah, the slave like me was compelled to escort them in that world and admire them in their unsubstantial galore and excellence...

"An inexplicable dizziness shrouded me. I turned my eyes away from the human bustle and looked towards a distant hill that towered above life towards the sky, the face of a rock hung on one side and a sparse vegetation of giant forest trees sat on its flanks up to its peak. My mind became the explosion ground for the tremors of the world. My head pounded like a mortar in which palm nuts were crushed. I became dizzy and weak, talking to people I did not know, people I did see (sic), voices clattering in my ears, voices laughing at jokes

that had no humour in them, dry twiggy jokes that had no taste. I wished that I stood at the top of Lebialem and tumbled myself into the water of life to cut a long boring story short. God of Abraham, God of Lebialem, God of my ancestors, God of knowledge! Did you that made the chicken make the poison of the snake, the deadly claws of the kite, and the fatal jaws of greedy men? For what purpose am I forsaken? For what reason do I live?

“There was a voice bantering in my soul: ‘Ngwe, leave that despair over petty things and stare into the bosom of the universe for the truth. The living things are in the hills and the valleys, the slopes and the ridges. You are the son of the hills and the valleys. You are the son of the dales and the caves under the giant rocks. You are the child of the bushes and the thickets in which abounds the abundance of life and to all these wonders of the universe you are bound. The truth is hidden in the womb of the universe that you see. Seek nature and disregard plastic truths of your oppressors. The fine synthetic tissues that embroider their skins are unloving. We in the hills and the valleys, the ridges and the slopes are the light of life.’

“A train of clouds paraded gracefully from one slope to the other and finally shrouded one of the slopes. It gave the image of a winged man and woman who were making a flurry crescent beneath the sun, and when the sun came to full view the clouds were tossed away in disorder. I heard the voices beyond the crescent shore of the hill, voices reverberating with sounds familiar with the talking drums at the entrance of the Attah palace. Laughter alluring and assuring cramming my senses and subduing me into a wistful delirium I could not understand. Ho! Ho! Hoooooooo!

“A fairy hand touched me on the shoulder. The fresh warmth of her palm gyrated through my body and I heard a voice call, ‘Ngwe.’ I was startled. I turned and beheld Shirila. She came right round to my side, holding me on the shoulder.

“‘Ngwe,’ her fairy voice echoed in my mind. It sounded like the voice of eternity. ‘Ngwe,’ she called again. I looked drearily at her face. I watched the tears roll on her hand and drop on my leg. I turned and looked away.

“‘Ngwe, what is the matter with you? Why are you so altered? You look really pale and unkempt. Ngwe, tell me,’ she said, shaking me lightly on the shoulder, almost weeping herself.

“She stared fixedly into my eyes but I did not feel anyone’s presence. My mind was gone and I could only hear the solid metallic voice echoing from the depths of Fuandem’s shrine.

“Ngwe, I have watched you from a distance. You don’t seem to be

yourself. Please, tell me what is really wrong with you,' she urged.

"Shirila, I don't know, I cannot say,' I told her wearily, becoming more and more aware of myself.

"Come. Let's go to my room,' she said. She held my hand and helped me to my feet (163-166).

Ngwe's depressive thoughts in this passage are engendered by the disappointing reality that at the end of four years in Besaadi he has failed his exams again, 'burning his mandat', meaning that he is no longer entitled to a stipend if he wishes to continue in the same Faculty. The depiction of the peculiar movement of his thoughts and the subtle changes in the quality of the thoughts lend to the texture of the writing here an admirable lyrical grace achieved by means worth pointing out. Besides, Ngwe tells his story with the aid of concrete images, parallel construction, and a characteristic turn of phrase, drawing from a creative spring essentially romantic. Some aspects of Ngwe's discourse are reminiscent of the idiom of the canonical Romantic poets, especially William Wordsworth and, to a limited extent, B.P. Shelley and John Keats with reference to the use of nature images and vocabulary like hills, valleys, dales, caves, rocks, bushes, thickets, nature, universe, clouds, sun, ridges, etc.

When Ngwe is being urged by a secret inner voice to disregard the antics of his sophisticated but inhuman oppressors and seek consolation in nature; when he is told 'We in the hills and the valleys, the ridges and the slopes are light of life,' the reader is reminded of the poetic truth in the poem "You Laughed and Laughed and Laughed" by the famous Nigerian poet, Gabriel Okara (24-25). There is a Biblical allusion implied in the question: 'For what purpose am I forsaken?' That question alludes to the Passion, the period of great suffering and death of Christ, when at the peak of his agony he cried: 'God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Mt. 27:46) or to the Psalmist's cry of anguish to the same effect (Psalm 22:1). This Biblical allusion has the effect of heightening the agony that Ngwe, a mere human, went through in Besaadi. These literary and Biblical echoes add richness, depth, charm and pleasure to Nkengasong's prose, making it enjoyable to read.

The lyrical effects of this passage are realized through parallelism and the modulation of certain words. Parallelism has to do with parallel construction which incorporates repetition of certain words or phrases while the rest of the structure slightly varies; that is, a parallelism consists of invariable and variable components. The repetitions are the invariable structures, while the rest of the expressions are the variable ones.

In this passage our first parallel structure is a three-tier construction

that begins with: 'I was'; that is, the invariable components repeated three times are 'I was ... I was ... I was ...' while the rest of the expressions vary. The latter utterances begin respectively with '... an intruder in the company ... the Anglo incapable ...; just in the world to ...' Now these parallel sentences do not come in quick succession, but are reasonably spaced out, so that the repetition: 'I was' is like a peak followed by a lull, then another peak and then a lull, creating, more or less, a measured repetition, a rhythm, a rise and fall that embodies the lyricism in Nkengasong's prose.

The second parallelism is less elaborate but equally effective; it consists of four exclamatory phrases in quick succession:

'God of Abraham, God of Lebiale, God of my ancestors, God of knowledge!' The invariable (fixed) component that is repeated four times is 'God of', followed, respectively, by 'Abraham', 'Lebiale', 'my ancestors', and 'knowledge'. The parallelism in quick succession here has the effect of giving emphasis and power to the author's words.

The third parallelism is the one produced by the secret voice addressing Ngwe and stressing the fact that he is the child of not an urban but rural setting, a three-tier parallel construction which runs thus: 'You are the son of the hills and the valleys. You are the son of the dales and the caves under the giant rocks. You are the child of the bushes and the thickets in ...'

A principle of parallelism is operational here. It holds that similarity in form leads to easy identification of similarity in content and function. It means that the main verbs and their objects in the sentences referred to carry equal weight and are of equal importance. With reference to our last parallelism, this means that the hills and the valleys, the dales and the caves, the bushes and the thickets are of equal importance and weight in Nkengasong's reckoning.

Nkengasong's condition of coloniality is an interesting phenomenon evident in his text. He is a post-colonial subject whose text is written in an imperial language, English. But the intimate and immediate circumstances of his life that make up his subject matter are Cameroonian (African). He is a child of two worlds, the one by virtue of his British colonial educational upbringing, the other by his close attachment to his Nweh tradition. His characters speak in English but an English transformed, in many cases, to reflect the idioms, and rhythms of Nweh native speakers, a reality signifying Nkengasong's hybridity. 'Ngwe, who went to Besaadi many years ago to *learn book* in that big school *where book ends*, had lost his head' (1). Therefore, to go by the flavour of the language of its characters, any informed student of literature in English reading *Across The Mongolo*, will instantly recognize it for what it is: a post-colonial text belonging not to English literature but to literatures in English.

Technically speaking, the author handles plot, structure,

characterization, language and narrative perspective well. He shows ingenuity in conceiving the narrative point of view, focalized essentially from the text's central consciousness, with only occasional interpolations from the omniscient narrator.

After everything, then, *Across The Mongolo's* uniqueness resides in the fact that it attempts to transcend merely deconstructing Anglophone victimhood to reconstructing some of the positive values that constitute the "Anglophoness" that Anglophones are yearning to perpetuate. Within the Cameroonian context this novel is a serious indictment of Francophone hegemony, and a scathing attack on Anglophones who deny the existence of the Anglophone Problem. Ultimately, the text amounts to an unsettling interrogation of history, a people, in short, the Cameroonian society as a whole. A gripping human story beautifully conceived and constructed, it is a lyrical, soulful cry from a sensitive mind, and a significant contribution to the development of the Cameroon novel in English.

As for Nkengasong's second novel, *The Widow's Might* (2006)⁵ it is a post-colonial text that juxtaposes the conflicting discourses of modernity versus tradition, and opens with the death of the pivotal character and politician, a man with a resonant Zairois-kind of name: Hon Makata Mbutuku, husband of Akwenoh, the central consciousness of the narrative. Set in Bakomba Town and Ekaka Village within the contemporary Cameroon, most of the story takes place within the time Hon Mbutuku dies and when he is finally laid to rest. Initially told by the third person omniscient narrator, the bulk of the story is focalized through the elaborate use of the flashback, from the consciousness of Akwenoh, the text's female subject. As she agonizingly waits for badly needed, but eventually non-existent, funds to give her spouse a befitting burial, Akwenoh goes through the traumatizing rites of widowhood (Ambanasom Review *Widow's Might* 5).

It is during this time that the author, through his adopted narrative technique, takes us to the shadowy past of Hon Mbutuku, and the wanton behaviour of Akwenoh. Indeed, the novelist does even more; he critically but artistically passes in review the hard realities of the Cameroonian socio-political and religious scene, encompassing the overwhelming pressure of indigenous values on the Western – educated, modern Cameroonian.

The reader thus comes to discover that Hon Makata Mbutuku and the Popular Democratic Party in which he militated are neo-patrimonialists opposed to the imperial principles advocated by the opposition party the 'Socialist Democratic Party ... forcefully launched in Bamankon ... in the early nineties' (46). The narrative of multiparty democracy projected by the opposition and which is their own way of attempting to usher in an alternative political dispensation, is therefore read negatively by the ruling

party. Mbutuku and his PDP emblemize political malpractice: election rigging, the stuffing of ballot boxes, the destruction of truth and even the elimination of political rivals like the unfortunate Barrister Same Same. Given the skeletons in his cupboard, Mbutuku's sudden and untimely death is a classic situation of nemesis catching up with him, and a lesson to those in powerful political positions who think they can perpetually play God over the dregs of humanity.

Essentially a nymphomaniac, Akwenoh cannot be sexually satisfied by a single man like Mbutuku, so she seeks sexual gratification outside wedlock. Like Chaucer's Wife of Bath Akwenoh has a number of paramours, and the one she is most sexually obsessed with is a certain Ebbi. It is in this promiscuous context that she comes into contact with a post-imperial Catholic priest with the very suggestive name of Father Vaginus, who has made cuckolds of several husbands in his parish. Father Vaginus is a post-colonial character and a neo-patrimonialist who has contaminated the imperial 'text'. From Nkengasong's text, therefore, Catholic theology as an imperial narrative is nowhere practised as pure 'text', but only an approximation.

Enter Ma Eseke and Chief Ekwe, respectively elder sister and brother of the deceased, and representatives of the conservative, indigenous values. They want to bury their late brother in a befitting traditional manner in their ancestral grove right in Ekaka Village. But the modern woman of the city, Akwenoh, will not yield, hence the drama over the corpse, the tussle between tradition and modernity. However, it seems to us that in this strife, through a series of coincidences all linked to Hon Mbutuku's murky past, the argument is weighted against Akwenoh. If tradition triumphs over modernity, if Akwenoh succumbs to the conservative forces at the end, it is not necessarily out of the force of their argument but rather because of the argument of destiny.

First following the death of the powerful politician, the widow is shocked to find only a paltry FCFA 20.000 in his briefcase; secondly the much-needed Parliamentary Group Support that would have covered all funeral expenses is not forth coming; worst of all the widow's already dire situation is further problematised by the fact that the deceased had defaulted on his loan with the National Bank of Credit and Commerce, in consequence of which the latter has impounded his compound as collateral, sending the proud widow packing, not only penniless but also homeless, with a bunch of brats to provide for. Thus crushed by fate, as it were, and eager to escape from the gloating smiles of her enemies and the mortification of the world, Akwenoh has no choice but to co-operate with the annoying relatives of her late husband.

Although it can be justified, the title of the text is a pun on the Biblical

‘the widow’s mite’. Akwenoh, the widow, does empty her purse to enable the casket bearing the remains of her husband to be transported across an impassable patch of the road to Ekaka Village. ‘Akwenoh took out the rest of the money she had in her life and gave’ the driver (147).

Slightly slim and slight in comparison with *Across the Mongolo* (2004), *The Widow’s Might* is, nevertheless, a work of high literary and social significance. If it lacks the lyricism and adumbrations of romanticism of the earlier novel, it gains in the concentrated, distilled nature of its narrative texture. However, in its psychological exploration of character and high readability, it is equal to the previous work. Above all, the socio-cultural and political themes including issues of moral decadence that it highlights will resonate well with many Cameroonians today.

In Chapter Six of this work we treated the theme of feminism in Alobwed’Epie’s *The Death Certificate*; here we will examine its political and economic aspects. Alobwed’Epie’s *The Death Certificate* (2004)⁶ is a national allegory of great resonance which, like Bole Butake’s dramatic parable, *And Palm Wine Will Flow* (1999), is set in a fictional African country called Ewawa. The text’s anti-hero is Mongo Meka who, whether dead or alive, remains the subject of interest for most of the narrative, and this because of his pivotal, if unpatriotic, function in the novel.

A native of the First Province and doubling as Treasurer General and Acting Director General of the Central Bank, Mongo Meka is the keeper of the keys to these financial institutions. He therefore enjoys unlimited access to cash at any time. Being an unconscionable individual, however, he embezzles the whopping sum of FCFA 550 billion, most of which he stashes away in a Parisian bank under the name of his French wife, and then fakes up death in a road accident in a neighbouring country, in a bid to forestall a possible prosecution for denuding the national treasury.

His death is mourned, and he is duly buried, with a certificate of death having been established in his name. Taking Meka’s death in earnest, however, his widow, Antoinette Yvonne, remarries, this time, a French man, Roger Girard, a development that threatens Meka’s machinations, forcing him to come back from the land of the dead to embarrass the living, with his ghostly reappearance. He initiates costly lawsuits against the French couple with the intention of putting them asunder. However, Meka is hoisted with his own petard, as his stratagem becomes a boomerang. His death certificate being genuine, Meka is legally considered dead, and the man now ‘masquerading’ as Mongo Meka, an impostor! To further compound Meka’s discomfiture, his alienated wife dies in a cyclone at sea in Australia, leaving her French husband the inheritor of Mongo Meka’s FCFA 350 billion in her account, legally putting the money far beyond

Meka's reach, a dramatic turn of events that impels the now impoverished and fugitive Meka to commit suicide in France.

To have a rough idea of the administrative set up of Ewawa, it is instructive to mathematically conceptualize it in terms of ten concentric circles each representing a province, thus making a total of ten concentric provinces. The province in the centre, the seat of political power and economic influence, is known as the first province. The closer one is to the centre of power and influence, the more satisfied or less censorious one is with regard to the system, and the reverse is true, discontent emanating from the periphery. Criticism is thus proportional to the distance from the centre, and the prerogative of the marginalized. No wonder, then, that the greatest critics of the government come from the marginal 9th and 10th Provinces (Ambanasom Review *Death Certificate* 8).

There is the hegemony of citizens of the First and Second provinces in all spheres of influence. They head key ministries, major lucrative companies and organizations, key financial institutions, the army, the gendarmerie and the police, etc. Their identifying terms are the kinship idioms of 'sons and daughters of the soil', or brothers and sisters of the First Province. What is at work here is the 'ethnicisation' of politics, since tribal Manichaeism is everywhere manifest. Perceiving themselves as the superior Self, fellows from the First and Second Provinces orientalize those of the peripheral provinces as the inferior Other.

Here one notices the collapse of the rational rules and regulations that governed the running of the Westaphalian bureaucracy. They are replaced by conventions of group solidarity. In this patrimonial renaissance setting, we have in place an administrative system run by neo-patrimonialists who identify themselves with a particular ethnicity. The rational boundary that distinguishes between the Ministry and the Minister, the office and the officeholder, is blurred. Now the Minister is identified as belonging to an ethnic group by virtue of kinship relationship with the Minister or officeholder. During the planning meeting for Mongo Meka's funeral rites, the Minister of Territorial Administration, referring to some absent Ministers, does so employing a kinship discourse to stress the fact that we are talking here of a tribe's Ministers, and not just any Ministers belonging to a universal national administration: '... I believe that five of our brother Ministers who are not yet here will not let us down ...' (2).

The monopoly of national financial resources by the citizens of the First and Second Provinces is dictated by selfishness and gross disregard for people belonging to other tribes. This is tribalism. But, as Godfrey B. Tangwa (1996) says, it need not be so:

The mere fact of belonging to a tribal group is not tribalism. It is not tribalism to form or to belong to tribal cultural or development groups, to 'drink' tribal *njangis* or even to fight for the improvement and welfare of members of your tribe. Tribalism is only involved when there is injustice, unfairness, prejudice or discrimination, *vis-à-vis* others ... If people always reasoned or reflected before acting or reacting, tribalism would have no place in their lives (58).

Tribalism, as seen by the fellows of the First and Second Provinces of Ewawa, is the theory and practice of ethnic politics; those of their elite charged with the management of public affairs are ruled and dominated by feelings of ethnic consideration. Since the elite in authority deal with power and economics, power in sharing resources, often scarce resources, they are bound, sooner or later, to betray their ethnic inclination when confronted with difficult questions as to who has what, when, and how much. They are constrained by strong, selfish ethnic attachment to give preference to people from the same area like them when giving out positions, posts, contracts or scholarships. They hardly, therefore, reason or reflect on the adverse consequences of their act. With ethnicity thus exalted, nepotism, favouritism and tribalism are accentuated in the novel.

The central theme that emerges from the text, dwarfing all the other themes, is that of organized pillage and unconscionable squandermania by members of a single tribe. These citizens manage public, money-generating institutions as if they were their private enterprises, running them wastefully; the money generated is spent as if the spenders are in a contest, i.e. as if they are striving to grab the trophy for the greatest squanderer, for the biggest spendthrift. The wastrels consume money as if the world is going to end tomorrow.

They dole out huge sums of money to relatives, friends and loved ones; they lavish impossible sums of money on themselves to sustain their wasteful, concupiscent lifestyles; they put a great deal of money into gigantic, ostentatious projects; they erect fabulous castles in the middle of the tropical forest; some go on expensive shopping sprees in Europe; others, like the Director of the Farmer's Cooperative Bank, (48), turn many expensive government vehicles at their disposal into their private cars to run their errands. The novel evokes huge financial figures that can make one dizzy; in places the sheer size of these figures is simply staggering and unfathomable.

A lifestyle like this is the central source of the corruption for which many African countries have become notorious today. Alobwed'Epie, in a way, rewrites Bate Besong's *Beasts of No Nation* (2003) a dramatic piece which holds that corruption in 'Ednouay' has become 'an industry' wherein '... frogs eat money

The way locusts

Eat tonnes of green' (102).

A behaviour like this cannot go on forever without obvious negative consequences; if it persists unchecked, it is bound to breed, sooner or later, untold unsavoury effects.

In his rave review of the text under discussion, Bate Besong said *The Death Certificate* 'is alternative fiction that anticipates, in every way, the better world of the future. It therefore entails a major shift in vision...' (Besong 'Prodigals' 9). In the sequel to the review he went on: The novelist strikingly uses a symbolic language to depict the First Province's

corrosive legacy, in order, to give a powerful visual effect to the fictional conflict adumbrated, and economize verbiage. His parables are short, bold and to their point. The first and third omniscient point of views form the dominant narrative voice in *The Death Certificate*, with the authorial voice constantly coming in, to make comments on the Nebuchadnezzar inclinations of the Ewawa Eboni Society members he is describing and evaluating...

The Death Certificate challenges the traditional western modes of presenting time, character, setting and other aspects of reality. It celebrates neologisms or word coinages, unorthodox use of French, Ewondo-Ezoum-Bulou, asymmetric and random renderings ... but it is also fiction, that overwhelmingly demonstrates that the post-colonial Cameroonian/African novel is an open form, and that there is no ideal form to which that genre must conform. It is broad enough to include such oral elements as narrative formulae, arresting images, alliterations, puns, exclamations, ideophones and aphorisms, digressions; counter-myths, oracular candour. Again and again, in *The Death Certificate*, the vision centres on the idea that no new society can be built in our trouble (sic) history unless there is social revolution which destroys, completely, the existing socio-political structure. Ewawa's problems will not be solved peacefully. When the child is coming from its mother's womb, he will come with blood. If there is no bloodshed, Ewawa, cannot have justice (Besong 'Prodigals' 8).

In these quoted passages, Bate Besong makes some very pertinent points about Alobwed'Epie's first novel, especially with regard to its innovatory technique and overall radical ideological temper. However, in his enthusiastic response to the work, Besong, in our humble opinion, seems to have overstated one thing while overlooking another, both with reference to technique. We do not agree with Besong when he says 'The first and the third

omniscient point of views form the dominant narrative voice in *The Death Certificate*, with the authorial voice constantly coming in to make comments ...’ This is because, as we have stated below, there is no authorial voice per se in this work, but rather a couple of first person narrators, unless we take the intelligent critical narrators, all of them mouthpieces of the author, to be Alobwed’Epie himself, which is quite a different thing from a third person omniscient narrator, anyway. Technically speaking, therefore, Alobwed’Epie has completely effaced himself in this work.

With regard to the author’s exploration of alternative ideological visions, Bate Besong is right to accentuate the revolutionary option for a new society. But to rule out categorically the possibility of a peaceful option artistically adumbrated is to fail to read the signs that the author subtly inscribes in his text. Having said this, however, in every other particular, Besong’s observations are generally to the point.

In addition to what Bate Besong has said, *The Death Certificate* exhibits a characteristic that postmodernists would like to celebrate because it is not usually associated with the typical traditional novel: the mixing of literary genres. As it explores and develops the absorbing story of the grubby banker, Mongo Meka, the text appears, in places, as a thriller, a detective novel, a piece of investigative journalism, a psychological, realistic novel, or a saga; it contains a handful of poems and several letters; it embodies passages from the Bible and elements from African orature. Accordingly, the language changes its texture; that is to say, Alobwed’Epie makes his prose, in places, conform to this or that set style. In short, the prose is stylized. In places it can read like a piece of satire, a didactic piece, a sermon, a parable, or a story told in imitation of the oral tale; in places the text reads like legalese, journalese or just a thriller, etc. A few pages even read like financial balance sheets. All of these postmodernist features signal the fragmentation of the ‘authentic’ novel, the disappearance of the ‘real’. To the postmodernists this mixing of styles signalizes an exhilarating and liberating escape from the ‘claustrophobic embrace of fixed systems of belief’ (Barry 84).

Incidentally, some aspects of this modernist/postmodernist characteristic are also found in L.T. Asong’s *Salvation Colony* (1997) and Nsanda Eba’s *The Multimillionaire* (1998). However, in African literature, the first African novelist to consciously use them extensively is the famous Kenyan writer, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, in his satirical novel *Devil on the Cross* (1982). As he comments on the genesis of his novel, Ngugi rationalizes his innovatory technique in the following words:

...I would use any and everything I had ever learnt about the craft of fiction – allegory, parable, satire, narrative, description, reminiscence,

flashback, interior monologue, stream of consciousness, dialogue, drama – provided it came naturally in the development of character, theme and story. But content – not language and technique – would determine the eventual form of the novel. And content? The Kenyan people's struggles against the neo-colonial form and stage of imperialism (qtd. in Cook and Okenimkpe 120).

From the point of view of focalization, Alobwed'Epie has deployed an ingenious narrative technique wherein the story is told by a crew of narrators, call them putative authors, with their own techniques; that is, different perspectives are adopted by them to comment on the same or related event, a kind of polyphonic narrative in which no narrator alone owns the complete truth, although the sum total of the various accounts constitutes the whole truth: knowledge about Mongo Meka, his kinsmen and the state of the national economy of Ewawa.

In creating these narrators to tell his story, Alobwed'Epie maintains his aesthetic distance. Among the key narrators are Mula, Nchinda, Musa and Ndjock, with Mula being the linchpin and the most conscientised of them all. They are university graduates, jobless because they come from marginal provinces; in contrast, their counterparts from the First and Second Provinces have jobs. Mula plays a crucial, albeit, indirect, formative role in the development of the critical consciousness of the readers and some of the other narrators. Without the exercise of their critical intelligence and the deployment of the skills of investigative reporting, much of the narrative, as we have it, would not have been so constructed; the facts, the comments and the truth, as they appear in the text, would not have been so presented, either.

The central narrators are the characters through whom Alobwed'Epie carries out the education of the deprived, and the marginalized. It is thanks to the kind of language with which he invests the discourse of the putative authors that citizens from the peripheral provinces can become conscientised about the havoc wrought on the national economy by a profligate ethnic group. The financial recklessness of the latter is pushing the country onto the brink of a revolution and chaos as evident in the apocalyptic discourse of the narrators. Alobwed'Epie, through the agency of the educators of the marginalized, makes this clear, thanks to their disturbing, figurative language.

In this regard, addressing Mula early in the novel, Nchinda says: 'These fellows of the First Province are going to rake this country bare ... This country is jubilating on a volcano of mismanagement, corruption and embezzlement. There's pus in our boil, it will burst' (12). The very idea of

a possible violent reaction that this provocative squandermania may give rise to is reiterated on page 51. On his part Musa, talking to Mula says:

For one thing, our leaders according to you are amassing wealth, they are depriving the common man of the bounty of our country. If this continues, they will become Louis XVI of France, his nobles and the clergy. It may be that's the situation we are living now with the way mere Directors flash 70.000.000 Frs. Pajeros around. So, ours may be in fact, the feudal system, now, 25 years only after independence. If, as you advocate, we should fight against the shackles of the system, then of course, we shall be reliving the experience of the storming of the Bastille and its consequences (51).

Similarly, Musa echoes it on page 192, 'We are brooding on an active volcano', which thought comes close to being practically enacted in the opening paragraph of the penultimate chapter of the text, as the whole nation is seething with anger and hatred against the denuders of the national treasury: 'The hatred had taste and smell. It was solid, as a bulldozer and moved like flowing lava. It hung in the air, on walls, everywhere. It was total' (295).

Thus through these unsettling, colourful representations of reality, Alobwed'Epie is subtly educating, sensitizing the common masses on what they can do. Therefore, the possibility of violence is real, but it is only an alternative option for a new society. Every significant work of art sets in motion a social dialogue. And the kind of social debate inspired by a work like *The Death Certificate* centres around many socio-political issues including violence, how to avoid the kind of violence imaginatively articulated by the novelist, in favour of peace. Nobody in his right mind would advocate violence for its sake. When the Cameroonian society can draw a lesson from such a novel, then its merit becomes clear. Herein lies the ultimate social relevance of Alobwed'Epie's text. In the words of Archbishop Paul Verdzekov, 'violence'

is not an issue that should be treated lightly, while sitting comfortably at one's desk, sipping a cup of coffee and eating a slice of bread. The violence Cardinal Tumi wants our country to avoid brings to mind certain images that would make any sensible person cry, throw up or burst out in indignation. Whoever dares to write on violence without having as sole aim to express his or her profound indignation, is committing a sin (16-17).

Another figurative representation would suggest that a new society can still be constructed through an inclusive peaceful forum of national reconciliation, suggested by Marie-Claire's father. Talking to her in a discourse full of allegorical significance, he says the cleansing of FramMki, Marie-Claire's defiled son, is not an individual affair, but one that involves the larger community:

The cleansing will require an assembly of the elders of our two communities. They will sit and discuss what happened, what provoked the elephant to trample on the crab. After that the two communities will invite herbalists on both sides and they will do the cleansing not only of the child, but of you and the Minister himself too – if there is yaws on one part of the body, the whole body is contaminated. Even your President is not free' (303).

However, any such gathering will not come easily, in view of the strong antipathy of some of those who matter; for, according to the Minister of Territorial Administration (M.T.A.), for instance, 'Only over our dead bodies can natives in the form of traditional doctors put us on trial. They can go to hell. Zero cleansing' (304). Should this declaration signify the possible failure of the peaceful option imaginatively proffered by the author, then the novelist is left only with the revolutionary choice.

For all his radical authorial ideology, however, Alobwed'Epie's ultimate artistic ambition is to bring about a new, prosperous and peaceful Cameroonian society. His goal is to explore ways for the emergence of a Cameroonian society fair and just to all its citizens with no discrimination. Indeed, the following words on Cardinal Tumi's intention in his recent book will perfectly fit Alobwed'Epie's intention in writing his novel:

The author's only ambition is to see the emergence of a new Cameroon with men and women who love their country and serve it in all transparency and honesty. This Cameroon is only possible if citizens understand that real happiness lies in doing everything possible to make others happy, that one cannot be happy alone (Verdzekov 17).

The novelists discussed in this chapter, Tah Asongwed, Francis Nyamnjoh, John N. Nkengasong and Alobwed'Epie, are not avowed Marxists for all we know; comparatively speaking their works are not conceived from an orthodox socialist vision of the world like Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* or, for that matter, the two Ngugis's *I Will Marry When I Want*. However, there is no denying that *Born to Rule*, *The Disillusioned African*, *Across the Mongolo* and *The Death Certificate* are texts whose conception and construction, from the authorial ideologies

contained therein, have been influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by Marxist thought. Their critical, radical tone lends to their authors' worldview something close to a socialist vision, necessitating thus a Marxist or at least a progressive interpretation such as that given them in this chapter.

The tenor of our discussion boils down to this, that the four Cameroonian novelists are visionaries who handle their common subject matter, the Cameroonian society, with intelligence and concern as they imaginatively explore it with its future in view. They propose counter ideologies to subvert the prevailing hegemonies for alternative constructions. With Asongwed, Nyamnjoh and Alobwed'Epie it is radical education for critical consciousness with which to unsettle the conservative ideology of the neo-patrimonialist; and with Nkengasong it is federalism with which to contest the assimilationalist authoritarianism that dominates. It is therefore the novelists' intention to artistically instruct and persuade the readers to view things radically as they (the authors) do for a meaningful societal deconstruction.

Notes

1. Tah Asongwed. *Born to Rule*. Silver Spring: Heritage Publishing Company, 1993. All further page references are to this edition.
2. Francis B. Nyamnjoh. *Mind Searching*. Awka: Kucena Damian Nigeria Limited, 1991. All further page references are to this edition.
3. Francis B. Nyamnjoh. *The Disillusioned African*. Limbe: NOOREMAC PRESS, 1995. All further page references are to this edition.
4. John Nkemngong Nkengasong. *Across the Mongolo*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2004. All further page references are to this edition.
5. John Nkemngong Nkengasong. *The Widow's Might*. Yaoundé: Editions CLE, 2006. All further page references are to this edition.
6. Alobwed'Epie. *The Death Certificate*. Yaoundé: Editions CLE 2004. All further page references are to this edition.

Conclusion

Until quite recently in Cameroon, discussions of Cameroon Anglophone literature have been dominated by interest in poetry and drama, particularly drama, with the novel largely neglected. But as we have seen in this study, the recent proliferation of novels of English expression makes a compelling case for critical attention to be paid to this genre. The fictional harvest is impressive; but scarce is the tribe of ardent critics. Anglophone literary critics should be eager to analyse and evaluate our fictional writing. Any evasive attitude towards it, on the part of the critics, is likely to produce from our midst a category of indifferent critics like dealers in foreign merchandise who stand at our coasts and gaze wistfully westwards as they hunger and thirst after Western products while at the same time they turn their backs on our fertile hinterland of fictional expression (Ambanasom 'Creators and Critics' 315).

Anglophone Cameroonian novelists are sensitive writers who, like their counterparts in other postcolonial societies, are producing their works in the context of some ideological and cultural assumptions. Consequently, they endeavour imaginatively to define their various standpoints vis-à-vis these postulates that merit critical attention. As we have said all along, the Cameroonian novelists of English expression artistically denounce and condemn the ills of their society. To do this they use satire as a weapon to criticise wittily and humorously the flaws, foibles and follies of human beings with the sole aim of correcting them. Since the intention of these novelists is to reform man and not to destroy him, to reform their society and not to destroy it, their satire is generally the Horatian type. The latter is the kind of mild satire that holds up to gentle ridicule the absurdities of human beings (Holman 217). It often makes use of humour, wit and irony of situation. It is different from the Juvenalian satire which is bitter, harsh and utterly destructive.

However, it will be more accurate to say that the satire of Cameroonian fictional writers of English expression oscillates between the Horatian and the Juvenalian types. While it is generally Horatian, at times it gravitates towards the Juvenalian; that is to say, in the hands of some novelists like those in Chapter Seven of this study, the satire may be mild and humorous, but occasionally it becomes more virulent, withering and scathing, translating, thus, the angry tone of voice of the narrators or authorial mouthpieces.

Apart from Mbella Sonne Dipoko's novels which, viewed from a colonial point of view, are lacking in moral seriousness, most of the other Anglophone texts are works from which the readers can draw one or two lessons for their edification. Consequently, the novels have some social relevance to Cameroonians, confirming, thus, the hypothesis stated in the introduction of this study. Generally, then, the Anglophone novelists are exploring, exposing and critiquing the social ills that plague their society and subtly urging the reader to view life from their ideological or moral positions. In other words, they are committed writers; but they are engaged novelists in varying degrees.

Some make their creative debut by espousing either cultural nationalism or anti-colonial nationalism; some focus their fictional gaze on the sordid underbelly of their own society, while others articulate burning issues of patriarchy versus feminism. But, above all, they are highly conscientised novelists with a heightened sense of ideological development who explore their basic subject matter, the Cameroonian society, with great concern; they attempt to socially deconstruct the Cameroonian society for a better future. Visionaries, they endeavour to reinvent a Cameroon with an alternative ideological or political dispensation. The latter are the novelists discussed in Chapter Seven.

Ideologically speaking, these novelists belong in the same progressive group with Anglophone Cameroonian playwrights like Bole Butake, Bate Besong, John N. Nkengasong, Victor Epie Ngome and John Ngong Kum Ngong, on the one hand; and, on the other, with radical poets like Bate Besong, Emmanuel Fru Doh, John Ngong Kum Ngong, Mathew Takwi and Giftus Nkam, etc. To this group we must add progressive, philosophical essayists like Bernard Fonlon and Godfrey Tangwa. All of these writers are committed educators of the deprived, very concerned with the human predicament, with the condition of the dregs of humanity (Ambanasom *Dregs of Humanity* 166). They are pre-occupied with the Anglophone Problem, in particular, and the Cameroonian socio-political situation in general.

In an open democratic society, alternative ideological visions urged by the novelists in Chapter Seven ought to be taken in good faith. They call for a lively public discourse by opinion leaders, writers and whoever has something useful to offer, an open debate duly publicised by the print and electronic media. Hopefully, with such a public dialogue, people's mentalities will be affected and transformed utterly. 'Therefore, criticism and alternative discourse should never be banned from public debate and dialogue, nor looked upon as a negative intellectual exercise; on the contrary, they can make for salutary self-renewal by a wise ruler' (*Ibid* 179).

Subject matter, ideological and thematic issues are not the only basis for the evaluation of the achievement of the Cameroonian novelists of English expression who are first artists before they are sociologists. Following the twin thrust of the Socio-Artistic Approach, the artistic aspects of the novels of these writers must be considered on an equal footing with their ideological dimension. In other words the approach places equal emphasis on the novels' matter and manner. Of course, harping on matter is good; dwelling on manner is even better; but the best is matter and manner combined (*Ibid* 8)).

Consequently, the novelists' works must equally be judged from the point of view of handling of technique and language. All this has been done in the study. From the discussion we have seen that the Anglophone novelists have adopted the English language, an imperialistic medium, to serve the Cameroonian vision (Ambanasom 'Cameroonian Novel' 138). They have handled the novelistic form and the English language with varying degrees of success or failure. Some have manipulated plot, characterisation, structure, point of view, and language fairly well, while others have been less successful. With the exception of novels published by Heinemann and some iconic publishing houses of international standing, nearly all of those printed locally can be faulted for editorial shoddiness, and as such stand in urgent need of editorial and technical improvement. However, viewed globally, the creative output by Cameroonian novelists of English expression is a positive contribution to the development of Cameroon literature in English. From the technical perspective with particular reference to the fiction of Alobwed'Epie, Margaret Afuh, L.T. Asong, Tah Asongwed, Mbella Sonne Dipoko, Kenjo Jumbam, Azanwi Nchami, John Nkemngong Nkengasong, and Francis B. Nyamnjoh, the Anglophone Cameroonian novel has contributed significantly to the extension of the frontiers of the African novel as an art form.

Biographical Notes on the Novelists

Margaret Afuh

Mrs Mba, née Margaret Afuh was born in Batibo, Momo Division, in the North-West Province of Cameroon. She attended PSS Batibo and CCAST Bambili before proceeding to the University of Yaoundé I and Créteil in Paris whence she graduated with a degree in Bilingual Studies in 1982. She worked as a translator in the former National Produce Marketing Board before entering the Higher School of Education (ENS) Yaoundé in 1990. She has been teaching literature in high schools. A multitasking woman, Margaret Afuh doubles as Secretary of the Women's Writers Association and Vice-Secretary of Anglophone Cameroon Writers' Association (ACWA). Currently she is the Provincial Pedagogic Inspector for English in the South-West Province.

Alobwed'Epie

Alobwed'Epie was born in Ngomboku in Kupe-Muanenguba Division in the South-West Province of Cameroon. He studied at the Universities of Yaoundé and Leeds. An Associate Professor, he teaches Creative Writing and Sociolinguistics at the University of Yaoundé I where he is also Head of the English Department.

Linus T. Asong

Born in 1947 in Fotabong in the South-West Province of Cameroon, L.T. Asong attended St Joseph's College Sasse before proceeding to three Universities from where he obtained the following degrees: a B.A. (Hons) Cape Coast, Ghana; an M.A. English – Creative Writing (Windsor Canada), and an M.A./Ph.D. Comparative Literature (Alberta). Formerly President of Anglophone Creative Writers' Association (ACWA), he is Associate Professor and teaches literature at ENS Annexe Bambili (University of Yaoundé I). His other publications include *Chopchair* and two joke books: *Laughing Store Volume I* and *Volume II*. Professor Asong has more novels in the pipeline.

Tah Asongwed

Born in Baforchu, Bamenda, in the North-West Province of Cameroon, Tah Asongwed attended Sacred Heart College Mankon and CCAST Bambili. He then worked briefly for Radio Cameroon, Buea, where he launched a popular nation-wide programme called 'Variety Show'. He later attended the Universities of Ottawa, Toronto, Massachusetts (Amherst), Paris III (Sorbonne – Nouvelle) and ESTICE, Lille. Tah Asongwed has worked as a full-time lecturer in the School of Translators and Interpreters of Laurentian University (Sudbury, Canada), and as an interpreter – translator for the West Africa Rice Development Association. He later worked as a senior interpreter with the African Development Bank in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. He is a member of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC).

Mbella Sonne Dipoko

Born in 1936 in Douala in the Littoral Province of (Francophone) Cameroun, Mbella Sonne Dipoko grew up in Anglophone Cameroon and Nigeria. In 1958 he joined the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation and became a News Reporter. In 1960 he went to live in France, and for some time was on the editorial staff of *Présence Africaine*. He then read law at the University of Paris. In addition to his two novels treated in this study, Dipoko has published a collection of poems: *Black and White in Love* (1972). He now lives in Tiko in the South-West Province and continues to write poetry.

Nsanda Eba

Nsanda Eba was born on September 21, 1936 in Mbo, Meme Division in the South-West Province of Cameroon. He attended St Joseph's College, Sasse, before proceeding to Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology Enugu, the University of Nigeria Nsukka, and then University of Exeter, England. He has a B.Sc in Mathematics and an M.A. in Education. He has been a Chargé d'Enseignement at the Ecole Normale Supérieure Bambili, and a Provincial Pedagogic Adviser on Mathematics, North-West Province. His other publications include *A Revision Course in Pure Mathematics*, and *The Good Foot* (an adolescent novel).

Kenjo Jumbam

Kenjo Jumbam was born in Banso, Bui Division, in the North-West Province of Cameroon. He attended Government Teacher Training College, Kumba, College of Arts, Science and Technology (CCAST) Bambili, University of Yaoundé and University of Leeds, England. He had a B.A. and an M.Lit. Formerly a secondary school teacher in Bafia and Mbengwi, he also worked at Centre National Pour l'Education, Yaoundé. He served as Private Secretary to the late Professor Bernard Fonlon when the latter was a Minister in President Ahmadou Ahidjo's regime. His other published works include *Lukong and the Leopard* (Heinemann) and 'Do Me I Do You' (*Mould* No. 6)

Langha Kizito

Born on October 5, 1959 at Akweto Nkambe, in the North-West Province of Cameroon Langha Kizito went to Saint Augustine's College, Nso, before entering the University of Yaoundé whence he obtained a Law Degree in 1981. Later he did an M.Sc. and a Ph.D. degree in Agro-Economics at Wye College, University of London. His literary interests began with a short story, 'A Day of Doom' (1978) which later appeared in *ABBLA Cameroon Cultural Review*. He worked for the North-West Development Authority – MIDENO. Prior to his death a few years ago, he had projected the publication of two more novels: 'Journal to Patricia,' and 'An Ostrich in the Rain Forest,' texts yet to see the light of day.

Eugene J. Kongnyuy

Eugene J. Kongnyuy was born in 1973 in Jakiri in Bui Division of the North-West Province of Cameroon. He attended Government Primary School Jakiri, Christ the King College Kumbo and CCAST Bambili. In 1992 he entered CUSS, now known as the Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences of the University of Yaoundé I, and graduated with a Doctor of Medicine (MD) degree, after seven years of intensive medical studies. He worked in the Bertoua Provincial Hospital, Cameroon, for two years from 1999 to 2001. He later on undertook a specialization course in Gynaecology and Obstetrics in the Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. He is married and has a son.

Azanwi Nchami

Azanwi Nchami hails from Bambui, Tubah Sub-Division in the North-West Province of Cameroon. She attended Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School, Mankon, Bamenda and CCAST Bambili before entering the University of Ottawa, Canada.

Talla Ngarka

Talla Ngarka was born in Ndu, Donga and Mantung Division in the North-West Province of Cameroon. After primary education at Tiko and Ndu, he trained at B.T.T.C Great Soppo, Buea. He later studied in Nigeria at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, where he obtained a B.A. (Hons) History before proceeding to the Postgraduate School of the University of Calabar whence he obtained an M.A. in History and a Ph.D. in History. He has taught at Cameroon Baptist Convention Colleges in Great Soppo, Buea, Njinikijem, Belo and Limbe. Presently he is a university lecturer in Nigeria.

Joseph A. Ngongwikuo

Joseph Anchanganayuoh Ngongwikuo was born in 1935 in Kom, Boyo Division, in the North-West Province of Cameroon. He attended Cameroon College of Arts, Science and Technology, Bambili before entering the University of Yaoundé and the University of Southern Illinois, U.S.A. He had an M.A. and a Ph.D. in Linguistics. He was a National Inspector of Education for English and later a lecturer at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, Yaoundé. His other published works include *The Village Schoolgirl*, *Taboo Kingdom*, *The Meaning of African Literature* (New Horizon).

Ngoran C. Tardzenyuy

Popularly known among his translator-colleagues and friends as NCT, was born in the early sixties at Kikaykom, Bui Division, in the North-West Province of Cameroon. He attended primary school in Kikaykom and Nwa. After a few years at home, helping his parents in farm work and other domestic chores, he went to Government High School Kumbo and later proceeded to the then University of Yaoundé where he read and obtained an English/French bilingual degree. Thereafter, he trained as a translator at the Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters (ASTI) Buea, Cameroon. He has been working as translator in the Cameroon Ministry of Territorial Administration since January 1993. He has successively held the posts of Bureau Head for French, Bureau Head for English, and Assistant Research Officer. Currently, he is Assistant of Professional Translators and Interpreters of Cameroon (APTIC).

John Nkemngong Nkengasong

Born in 1959 in Lewoh Fondom in Lebialem Division in the South-West Province of Cameroon, John Nkemngong Nkengasong was educated in Seat of Wisdom College, Fontem, and later in the University of Yaoundé I, whence he obtained a Ph.D. and where, as a Senior Lecturer, he now teaches

literature. A critic, playwright and a poet, he is ‘one of the most virulent of Cameroon’s literati.’ Under his dynamic impetus as the current President of Anglophone Writers’ Association, many Anglophone Cameroonian creative works have been published with the help of subvention from the Ministry of Culture. His other publications include *A Stylistic Approach to Literary Appreciation*, *Black Caps and Red Feathers*, a collection of poems titled *Letters to Marion and the Coming Generations*, and several scholarly essays published in national and international journals.

Francis B. Nyamnjoh

Francis B. Nyamnjoh was born in Bum, Menchum in the North-West Province of Cameroon. He attended the University of Yaoundé where he read Sociology. He has a Ph.D. in the Sociology of Communication from the Centre for Mass Communication Research (CMCR), University of Leicester, UK. His other publications include *The Convert* (a play) and several scholarly works and studies. He is currently Head of Publications and Dissemination with the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), Dakar, Senegal. He is married with children.

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“...a remarkable work which is likely to reshape the course of future studies of the Cameroon novel in English. It is also an indispensable volume for students, teachers, researchers and all those with an interest in modern critical theory.”

**Professor Kashim Ibrahim Tala, Faculty of Arts,
University of Buea, Cameroon**

Initially considered something of a black sheep within the Anglophone Cameroon literary genres, the Anglophone novel has gradually grown to carve out a respectable niche for itself in the Anglophone Cameroon sub-system, imposing itself in a way that makes it impossible for critics to ignore it. Now a vibrant genre, it even threatens to overtake drama and poetry, both of which have enjoyed more critical attention. This book is a study of how Anglophone Cameroon has contributed in extending the possibilities of the novel as a literary form, and of some of the established conventions necessary for a fruitful evaluation of the growing body of the Cameroonian novel in English. In this eclectic and compelling book, Ambanasom sets out to achieve three primary objectives: to introduce the reader to the extensive body of Cameroonian novels in English, to re-examine the distorting and limiting criteria upon which the critical assessment of the Cameroonian novel in English has so far been based, and to bridge the widening chasm between literary theory and actual critical practice.

To achieve these objectives, Ambanasom begins by elaborating an alternative and flexible theoretical framework which he christens the ‘Socio-Artistic Approach’ and which, according to him, is ‘concerned with both a text’s thematic, moral, cultural or ideological issues, on the one hand, and its central literary analysis, on the other.’ He then proceeds to use this new critical framework to examine twenty-seven major Cameroonian novels in English. There are critical voices, already emerging within the Anglophone Cameroonian literary circles, calling for rigorous teaching and practice of theory in the interpretation of literary works, setting in motion a critical discourse. Such a call is salutary, and welcome. Those university lecturers whose responsibility it is to teach theoretical courses should take this call very seriously, moving from theory to hands-on practice. This book is Ambanasom’s contribution to that critical debate.

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